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Faith in Action for Social Justice

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

INSIDE THE MIND OF A HATE GROUP

Behind the scenes
at Westboro
Baptist Church

PLUS:

Occupy Corinth:
Paul's letter to the 1%

Motown Lives!
A vision for a
resurrected Detroit

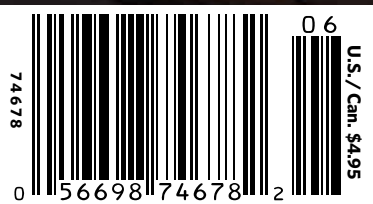
E.J. Dionne Jr.
on the dangers
of Supreme
'activism'

Megan Phelps-Roper,
granddaughter of
Westboro Baptist
founder Fred Phelps,
in her Topeka,
Kansas home.

GOD

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AMERICA



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14



26



34

sojourners

contents

JUNE 2012 Vol. 41 | No. 6

COVER

14 The Face of Hate

Inside Westboro Baptist Church: an interview with scholar Rebecca Barrett-Fox, by Joanie Eppinga.

FEATURES

20 Resurrecting Detroit

Angela Glover Blackwell's vision for a city reborn.
by Elizabeth Palmberg

Plus: Detroit's future in receivership, by Bill Wylie-Kellermann/23
A farm grows in Motown, by Korla Masters/25

26 Paul's Letter to the 1%

Lessons for today from the apostle's attack on elitism in Corinth.
by Reta Halteman Finger

30 Can These Bones Live?

Resurrecting a buried history and human dignity in Guatemala.
by Emilie Teresa Smith

34 A 'Bizarre and Peculiar' Ruling

How the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision is leading to a more-divided nation.
by E.J. Dionne Jr.

CULTURE WATCH

38 Our Bodies, Our God

Reviews: *Sweet Heaven When I Die*; *Stream of Conscience*; *Missional Preaching*

40 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

41 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Personhood for profit

9 Iran

10 Trade vs. democracy

COLUMNS

7 Grain of Salt

by Jim Rice

12 Global Engagement

by Lynne Hybels

19 Godstuff

by Cathleen Falsani

50 H'rumps

by Ed Spivey Jr.

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

37 Poetry

47 Short Takes

48 Living the Word

by Martin Smith

Meet the SUSTAINERS CIRCLE

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Monthly
Giving
Club

Family photo

Rachel Evans

Site director at The New Teacher Project, an educational nonprofit
Sustainers Circle member!

Meet one of the newest members of the **Sustainers Circle**, Rachel Evans from San Francisco!

Rachel was excited to discover Sojourners in 2008 when she attended a Sojourners conference in Washington, D.C. She was inspired by the community of Sojourners supporters who actively advocate for social justice for our country and the world in a way that is in alignment with the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. She appreciates the way in which Sojourners uses its magazine and media to consistently challenge those who forget the Christian responsibility to the poor. In Rachel's words, we "must be one with the marginalized if we want to be one with Jesus."

"Money equals influence in this country. Most of the time, that influence is used to promote the agendas of those in power," Rachel says. That's why Rachel decided to become a part of the **Sustainers Circle** last year: "I don't have a lot of money of my own, but when I give to Sojourners my donation is added to thousands of other donations. Together we can have a big voice that speaks up for those who are marginalized and disempowered."

Join Rachel—and more than 2,000 other members of the **Sustainers Circle**—by setting up your monthly gift to Sojourners today! Visit www.sojo.net/sustainer or call (202) 745-4634 to start your donations.

: "Christians
: should always
: be on the side
: of the poor
: and the
: oppressed."

WHY RUN AN article about Westboro Baptist Church, a hate group that cloaks itself in Christian garb? That's a question we wrestled with when considering this issue's cover story. We believe that God loves everyone; Westboro believes that's a heretical "lie," so we don't want to needlessly give them a spotlight. And, like researcher Rebecca Barrett-Fox, we want to be clear that conservative or Calvinist theology definitely doesn't *have* to end up proclaiming misogyny, homophobia, and God's hate. (The Primitive Baptist denomination, of which Westboro claims to be part, explicitly disowns it and calls Westboro's actions unbiblical.)

Ultimately, exposing Westboro's inner sociological, psychological, and theological mechanics might help others avoid taking

any steps down its road. How can a group of otherwise functional people—with careers in nursing and computer science, whose kids go to public school and seem "normal," all led by a former civil rights lawyer—sustain itself in spewing out such venom? What makes exploring this subject bearable, even full of grace, is the way Barrett-Fox approaches it: drawing strength from her family and relationships, taking insights from feminist ethnography about how to use empathy without allowing it to dull critical thinking, and remembering that, like Paul of Tarsus,



even the hate-filled people of Westboro are not beyond God's ability to redeem.

Among this month's other offerings are two takes on a type of "person" made not by God, but by a legal fiction: corporations. E.J. Dionne examines the Supreme Court decision to allow corporations to make unlimited political donations, while Catholic theologian Vincent Miller points out perhaps the worst effect of making corporations "people": the danger that real humans, made in God's

image, may be pulled to make themselves over in an amoral corporate likeness. ■

Letters

CITIZENS VS. CITIZENS UNITED

I wish Bill McKibben's "And God Created ... Corporations" (April 2012) could magically appear in the inbox of each state and federal senator and representative. A corporation is a soulless, incorporeal, supranational, immortal legal device for assembling, managing, and deploying wealth. We should be thankful that corporations do good things. They feed, clothe, house, and entertain us pretty well. However, a corporation cannot be expected to deliver the values that a human, God-fearing society needs.

McKibben exposes the essential flaw in the Supreme Court's 2010 decision *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission*. The tsunami of corporate campaign funding it enabled deepens cynicism about political leaders. Millions of Americans now see no point in voting.

I still see hope: People are active in efforts to "overturn" *Citizens United* with a constitutional amendment. Here in west Michigan, I have joined and support Move to Amend (movetoamend.org) and its local affiliate, Move to Amend—Grand Rapids. We maintain that a corporation is not a "person" and should not share in the constitutionally guaranteed liberties that are meant for people. A friend of mine at church said, "We, as people, have God-given rights. Corporations don't." Yes!

"People have God-given rights. Corporations don't."

Take heart, fellow Democrats and Republicans and independents! We will get through this, and democracy will be stronger. The revolution, now 236 years old, continues!

Vince Schumacher

Grand Rapids, Michigan

INJUSTICE IN JUSTICE?

Kimberly Burge paints a harrowing portrait of injustice in "The Innocence List" (April 2012). The fact that there are more than 140 people who were released from death row due to a lack of evidence and racial discrimination is alarming. How many innocent people have been wrongly executed over the past 35 years?

In November 1980, the U.S. Catholic bishops issued a statement on capital punishment that called for an end to the death penalty. They rightfully advocated that capital punishment was not a crime deterrent, but a deterrent to the existence of humanity.

The stories of victims such as Juan Roberto Meléndez and Shujaa Graham (a Witness to Innocence member who was framed for a 1973 murder he did not commit) call to mind the evils of racial profiling. However, having met Graham at a theology

conference last year, I can attest that he is a true witness to the power of Christian forgiveness. Not bitter about his prison experiences, he expresses more concern for the welfare of future generations of children, knowing that there will one day be justice born out of injustice.

Robert P. Russo

Perrysburg, Ohio

COMPARISONS FOR THE CROSS

Regarding your review of James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* ("Were You There?" by Andrew Wilkes, March 2012): Cone's point is an important one. But given that the crucifixion is presented by the gospels as largely following *legal* procedures, another way to help Americans appreciate the meaning of the cross is to compare it to the electric chair. We are the followers of a man who was publicly, officially executed in the most horrifying way.

Norm Mundhenk

Poulsbo, Washington

Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010 or letters@sojo.net. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM RICE

Fairness for Whom?



IT'S A GOOD sign we've entered the election silly season when pundits are arguing against "fairness." What's next, apple pie? (Motherhood, of course, is already a battleground of the "mommy wars"—Lord help us!)

The Democrats are trying to take the pro-fairness side of the debate, in particular around the issue of tax rates for the wealthiest Americans. The so-called Buffett Rule—named after billionaire Warren Buffett, who pointed out the injustice of his paying a lower tax rate than his secretary—became a key talking point the week before April 15.

Here's how President Obama put it: "Right now, the share of our national income flowing to the top

having the rich pay a higher tax rate "won't take a single person off the unemployment line." (It also won't end the war in Afghanistan, he didn't add.) Others brought out the tired accusation of "class warfare."

While increased tax rates for millionaires and billionaires aren't likely to easily slide through Congress (44 percent of whose members are millionaires themselves), some high-income people are the measure's strongest backers. A group called "Patriotic Millionaires for Fiscal Strength," comprised of people with annual incomes of \$1 million or more, wrote, "Given the challenges we must face, it is mind-boggling that one-quarter of all millionaires pay a lower tax rate than millions of middle-class families. Implementing the 'Buffett Rule' is not the only thing we need to do to ensure the success of our country; but it is certainly one of the most obvious."

Beyond the rhetoric and political posturing by both parties, differences in approach to tax policy sometimes actually do represent real political and philosophical disagreements. But over the past generation, we've seen a tectonic shift in wealth in this country—you could call it trickle-up economics, but it's been a roaring river instead of a trickle—alongside a steady decline in the rates that the wealthiest pay. The top marginal tax rate for millionaires in 1963 was 91 percent; now it's down to 35 percent, and some want to decrease it even further—at a time when incomes for the wealthiest 1 percent have risen by 281 percent in the last three decades.

There used to be a bipartisan consensus that the wealthy should pay their fair share. Even Ronald Reagan, patron saint of the Far Right, decried tax policies that "sometimes made it possible for

millionaires to pay nothing, while a bus driver was paying 10 percent of his salary—and that's crazy!"

FAIRNESS, OF COURSE, is a central theme in scripture. While fairness and justice for everyone is a laudable goal, the emphasis of biblical justice is consistently on people who are poor, marginalized, and oppressed. (The biblical writers seem to understand that the rich manage to take care of themselves all too well.) The way to judge if a society is "fair"—that is, the biblical yardstick for justice—is to look at the treatment of the poor and outcast—the least of these, as Jesus put it.

Political discourse in this country, especially around election time, tends to pay little attention to people who are poor (at least since Robert Kennedy's "poverty tour" of southeastern Kentucky in 1968). Candidates from both parties work to position themselves on the side of the middle class—the crass political analysis is that "poor people don't vote," and middle-class people are more inclined to "aspire upward" than to see themselves as one paycheck removed from poverty themselves. It's a safe bet that this election will be no different.

But Christians ought to remind politicians, at every opportunity and at the polling place, that we do care about how our society treats poor people—that our vote isn't just focused on self-interest. Fairness matters, especially for people on society's margins—and that conviction goes far beyond tax equity to every aspect of public policy. For people of the Book, it's much more important than politics; it's a matter of faith. ■

Jim Rice is editor of Sojourners. Hearts & Minds is on hiatus during editor-in-chief Jim Wallis' sabbatical.

For people of the Book, it's much more important than politics.

1 percent has climbed to levels we haven't seen since the 1920s. And yet those same people are also paying taxes at one of the lowest rates in 50 years. That's not fair." (The Occupy movement arguably deserves most of the credit for that framing of the issue.)

The president's political opponents were quick to dismiss the focus on tax fairness as campaign rhetoric aimed more at the fall elections than any meaningful policy goals. It's a safe assumption that pretty much anything between now and November has that partisan goal in mind, and—perhaps not surprising—fairness polls well.

But the critics didn't stop there. Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer, for instance, called the Buffett Rule "nothing but a form of redistributionism," and said that focus on the tax fairness issue "is an exercise in misdirection." Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said that

Hannah McNeish/IRIN



'I Was Thirsty'

A girl digs for water at the Jamam refugee camp in South Sudan, where more than 37,000 people have arrived since the start of 2012, escaping violence in Sudan's Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states. "We know that this water is not good," said Macda Doka Waka, 19, who dug for three hours to fill one can, but the taps are dry. In April, President Obama released \$26 million to the U.N. to aid Sudanese refugees fleeing the border conflicts.

By Vincent Miller

Personhood for Profit

Seeing corporations as people, are we making ourselves over in their image?

ARE CORPORATIONS "persons"? Legally, they are. They have the right to own property, to enter into contracts, to sue for defamation. Thanks to *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission*, they also have "free speech" rights. Voting is the only right corporations lack—and the tsunami of political money unleashed by that Supreme Court decision makes that limit irrelevant.

"Person" is an important word for Christianity. We speak of the three divine persons of the Trinity, and of the human person made in the image of God. What are we to make of "corporate personhood"? It's tempting to invoke idolatry and the golden calf of Exodus. However, corporate persons are akin more to the "golem" of Jewish folklore—a human creation that fulfills our immediate goals, but brings about unforeseen destructive consequences.

Mitt Romney's campaign gaffe "Corporations are people, my friend" points to the problem. He wasn't arguing that corporations are literal people, but that they

are made up of people working together. But what matters is the nature of these shared projects: The corporation insulates its anonymous stockholders from liability and works solely to maximize the value of their investments.

Indeed, the "corporate person" is the perfect *homo economicus*. A human owner of a firm, no matter how hard-eyed, will still have moral qualms and live in a community that judges his or her character. In contrast, the corporate person has no interior life. These abstract "persons" are served by trustees with the responsibility to do everything legally possible to maximize profits. They may regret abandoning devoted workers in order to seek cheap labor, but if they refuse, they fail in their fiduciary duty to the corporate person's one-dimensional interests.

Corporations originated in thick moral and communal contexts that yoked them to the common good. Their specialization and efficiency brought many benefits, including

large-scale manufacturing and long-term research and development. But over the years their efficiency, focus, and accumulation of wealth and power enabled them to overcome the limits originally placed on them. They shook free of the communities where they originated and now transcend even the states that charter their existence. They are powerful "citizens" with the narrowest of interests, striding about the world dictating terms to the communities and governments with which they deal. They simplify the world, removing the legal, regulatory, moral, and cultural obstacles to their pursuit of profit.

And, in fact, this curiously incorporeal corporate model has come to truncate our very concept of *human* personhood, as the corporate person's transactional relationships become the model for everything. Participatory citizenship and the common good are replaced with the individual taxpayer's demand for value. The nation-state's obligation to all its citizens is replaced with an economic logic of a serviceable market.

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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The U.S. Postal Service is derided as obsolete, as corporate competitors cherry-pick profitable markets and ignore the rest. Marriage becomes a transactional contract. The nuclear family is cut off from broader relations to focus solely on its own welfare. Our embodied vulnerability ceases to be something that binds us together in solidarity, and becomes instead something we address individually by managing our personal retirement and health-care portfolios.

The answer is not to simplistically condemn corporations, but to bring the Christian understanding of our creaturely

personhood—finite, mutually dependent, and graced—to bear against the truncated corporate fiction. We can then clearly see the limited value of these inventions and guide them so that they may serve, rather than replace, us. What has been long underway in legislation, tax codes, and Supreme Court decisions is nothing less than a hidden fight for the truth of the *human* person. ■

Vincent Miller teaches theology at the University of Dayton and is the author of Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture.

By David Cortright

Preventing an Iranian Bomb

History shows engagement, not attack, dissuades countries from developing nuclear weapons.

CALLS FOR THE use of military force against Iran are dangerously misguided. Israeli bombing strikes are not capable of destroying Iran's deeply buried and dispersed nuclear program, most experts agree. Attacking Iran would prompt a violent reaction that could plunge the United States into another war and unleash a regional conflagration. According to U.S. intelligence estimates, Iran has not yet decided to build a nuclear bomb. If attacked, Iran would almost certainly resolve to proceed.

Consider the lessons of history: Israel's bombing of a nuclear reactor near Baghdad in 1981, far from ending Iraq's nuclear program, prompted Saddam Hussein to accelerate that program and begin manufacturing weapons-grade uranium. When U.N. inspectors entered the country 10 years later, they discovered that Iraq was only a year or so from having the bomb. The inspectors dismantled Iraq's nuclear program, succeeding where bombing had failed.

Sanctions and diplomacy offer a far less risky and more effective strategy for preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. To be successful, however, sanctions must be combined with incentives as part of a diplomatic strategy designed to achieve a negotiated settlement.

The Obama administration has convinced the U.N. Security Council and countries in Europe and beyond to join in a rigorous set of sanctions that have cut

off financial transactions with Iran's major banks and curtailed purchases of Iranian oil. As a result, inflation is rising, the Iranian *rial* has lost half its value in the past year, and economic hardships are mounting.

Such costs have not stopped Tehran from enriching uranium and steadily enhancing its nuclear capability—and, indeed, past experience shows that sanctions alone never succeed in stopping nuclear proliferation.

Over the decades more than two dozen countries have considered but then decided not to develop or maintain nuclear weapons capability. In almost every instance, countries were persuaded to give up the bomb because of improved political and economic conditions or in response to security assurances and financial incentives, including the offer to lift sanctions. In Libya in 2003, for example, the Gadhafi regime agreed to abandon its weapons of mass destruction as part of a diplomatic bargain that eventually removed U.S. sanctions and opened the country to international investment. The art of diplomacy lies in creatively blending pressures and inducements. Convincing countries to forego the bomb requires cooperating with them, however unpalatable that may be with a regime such as Iran's.

Diplomatic options are available for defusing tensions with Iran. A first step would be to resume negotiations for a uranium fuel swap: Iran would transfer some of its low-level enriched uranium to another country,

From the Archives

June 1990

Women's Concerns

WITH THE publication of the second draft of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral on women's concerns, *One in Christ Jesus*, the inherent problematic of the process continues. Simply stated, that problematic is that a committee of men, albeit men of good will, circumscribed by a patriarchal institution, are attempting to respond to the current women's movement, whose goal is to dismantle patriarchy in all its personal and structural manifestations.



Despite the bishops' extraordinary effort to listen to women in more than 100 diocesan hearings ... the historic problem remains intact: The men of the Roman Church continue to assume the right and the responsibility to define women and to interpret women's experience.

Identifying this central problematic does not deny that the bishops on the pastoral committee have tried to respond to the issues women named in the hearings and in the responses to the first draft. They have listened, and they have been able to name many of the critical issues and unjust circumstances that shape women's lives. They have clearly identified sexism as a sin and have recognized the church's implication in the perpetuation of that sin. That is a significant admission. ... However, they have not been as successful in charting a direction that will lead the church and the society beyond sexism, because they have not addressed the central problematic—the patriarchy that structures the Roman Church.

Maria Riley, O.P., worked for the Center of Concern when this article appeared.

probably Russia, for further enrichment and return as fuel pads for medical isotopes. This would lower Iran's growing stockpile of low-enriched uranium—and, more important, set a precedent for greater transparency and international participation in Iran's nuclear program. U.S. and European officials complain that the proposed deal has loopholes and would not shut down continuing enrichment. But the swap, as proposed by Iran, Turkey, and Brazil two years ago, is not meant as a final resolution but rather as a confidence-building process to begin dialogue.

Ultimately, the U.S. and its partners will need to accept Iran's right to enrich uranium. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty does not prohibit enrichment and in fact guarantees the "inalienable right" of all states to

develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Leading opposition figures and Green Movement activists in Iran oppose further sanctions and support Iranian development of nuclear technology—although they support compliance with international monitoring. An offer to accept enrichment in return for more rigorous inspections could be decisive in resolving the nuclear standoff.

Words are better than war. Negotiating with Tehran offers the best option for preventing nuclear proliferation and avoiding military disaster. ■

David Cortright, a Sojourners contributing writer, is director of policy studies at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

By Conrado Olivera and Jed Koball

Trade Agreements vs. Democracy

Lawsuits help corporations run roughshod over governments and the environment.

THE ANONYMOUS DEATH threats phoned to Archbishop Pedro Barreto and others in March told them to stop speaking out about the foreign-owned metals smelting plant in La Oroya, Peru.

Barreto, a Catholic archbishop of the Andean region that includes La Oroya, has been a leading advocate for the health of the 35,000-person town, which the plant has made one of the world's most contaminated places: 99 percent of children there have dangerous levels of lead in their blood.

However, in an unconscionable move made possible by the 2009 U.S.-Peru trade agreement, it is the polluter who claims to be the victim. The massive New York-based holding company Renco Group Inc., whose subsidiary Doe Run Peru owns the smelter, last year filed an \$800 million trade-tribunal lawsuit against the Peruvian government, claiming it violated the company's rights by enforcing environmental regulations in La Oroya.

It's one of a growing wave of such arbitrations being filed all over the world by extractive-industry foreign investors. In a similar case, the transnational corporation Pacific Rim has filed a \$70 million case against El Salvador, after local communities and activists—four of whom have been murdered—opposed gold mining that could

contaminate one of the country's largest rivers.

The suits circumvent nations' environmental laws by exploiting so-called "investors' rights" chapters of trade agreements; such provisions are common in bilateral trade agreements, such as the U.S.-Peru pact, and regional agreements such as NAFTA.

When Renco purchased the La Oroya smelting plant in 1997 from a state-owned company, the U.S. corporation agreed to complete a government-authorized environmental program within 10 years. Peru allowed the company a series of extensions and changes, but finally began to enforce environmental regulations in the face of a broad-based ecumenical campaign that included letter-writing, vigils, marches, and more by Barreto's Catholic archdiocese, the National Council of Evangelical Churches of Peru, the Peruvian umbrella group Red Uniendo Manos (Joining Hands Network), and international partners.

However, 15 years after its purchase, Doe Run Peru has failed to complete the environmental program—and Renco now claims that Peru's environmental enforcement violated its rights by leading to Doe Run Peru's bankruptcy.

In the non-transparent trade tribunals in which such lawsuits are settled, investors

can sue nations, but nations can't sue investors. Foreign investors can sue not only for profits lost but for profits *potentially* lost, resulting in multi-million dollar awards. In arbitrators' deliberations, no weight is given to a nation's constitution or laws, only to the trade agreement's investment chapter—whose often-vague terms (such as “fair and equitable treatment”) are, at present, often interpreted in favor of corporations. This bias isn't surprising: Arbitrators for trade tribunals such as the U.N. Commission on International Trade Law, in which the Renco suit was filed, or the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), are selected from a roster of international trade lawyers. They are not ordinarily well-versed in human rights, environmental law, or the social impact of legal rulings.

There is no right to appeal. And the investor-state lawsuit strategy is being increasingly employed: In 1996, three arbitrations started moving through the ICSID; in 2011, 38 were begun.

In effect, a foreign investor such as Renco has greater rights in Peru than the very citizens of La Oroya. At press time, the potential cost of an adverse judgment was pressuring the Peruvian legislature to consider allowing the dirty plant to re-start operations without complying with the environmental provisions.

The Peruvian Joining Hands Network, supported by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and other NGOs and faith-based groups, has launched a campaign called “No Greater Rights for Foreign Investors.” Inspired by the words of the prophet Ezekiel, who cried out to the King of Tyre, “in the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence and you sinned” (28:16), the campaign is demanding a reform of trade agreement chapters on investment, including a rejection of investor-state arbitration and the formation of alternative, transparent regional tribunals to handle disputes. Such work is shaped by the faith-based understanding that the moral test of the globalizing economy is whether it serves the human enterprise and creation, not just national advantage and corporate profit. ■

Conrado Olivera is the executive director of the Joining Hands Network and Jed Koball is a mission co-worker of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Both are based in Lima, Peru.

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Stunned and Hopeful

THE CONFLICT between Israelis and Palestinians is often seen as a conflict between Jews and Muslims. But there are also minority communities of evangelical and other Christians who are caught up in the conflict. This includes Jewish followers of Jesus in Israel who call themselves Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians in the West Bank. Sadly, the chasm between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians is deep. The end-times theology espoused by Messianic Jews can be interpreted in a way that supports the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. At the same time, Palestinian Christians can become so focused on the hardship of living under oppressive military occupation that they forget the justifiable fear of violence that haunts Jewish residents as well.

International Christians, even those who try to honor the dignity of both Israelis and Palestinians, tend

conference inadvertently fueled hostility and division? Rarely have I gone into an event so fearful of outcomes and so earnest in praying for God's intervention.

Six hundred people from 20 nations attended the five-day conference. More than 30 Palestinian, Israeli, and international speakers presented Bible studies, academic lectures, panel discussions, workshops, and personal testimonials. Teachers as diverse as John Ortberg, Tony Campolo, Chris Wright, Shane Claiborne, Sami Awad, Bob Roberts, Ron Sider, and Joel Hunter taught on forgiveness, reconciliation, nonviolence, and peacemaking.

As I had anticipated, the division between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians was woven throughout the sessions, but—thankfully—it was no accident. Several keynote sessions were presented by Messianic leaders. “I’m here to ask you to help me make the journey to reconciliation and discover what it means for us to be united,” said Richard Harvey, a Messianic Jewish theologian, church planter, and evangelist. Wayne Hilsden, senior pastor of King of Kings Community, a Messianic congregation in Jerusalem, engaged in a public dialogue with Wheaton College professor Gary Burge about their theological differences. Messianic pastor Evan Thomas and Palestinian Christian Salim Munayer gave a joint presentation about their ongoing work to bring Jewish and Arab Christians together for reconciliation and peacemaking.

In the weeks after the



Palestinian worship band at “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference.

Christine Anderson

conference, I entered a time of fasting and prayer, pondering the truths of the conference presentations as I listened to them again on Vimeo. As I listened and prayed, I recalled an informal conversation I had during the conference.

After I gave a talk about what I’d learned in Israel and the West Bank in recent years, a man said to me, “I’m a Messianic Jewish theologian from Jerusalem. I believe the Jews have a unique role to play in God’s purposes, and I support the state of Israel. But the kind of injustice you described tonight is unconscionable. We Jews don’t realize what is happening to the Palestinians. Maybe sometime you can come and tell our Messianic congregations what you’ve seen.” I am still stunned that an Israeli Jew suggested that I speak to his friends and colleagues about the daily suffering of Palestinians. Stunned and hopeful.

Few people I know believe peace in the Holy Land is really possible—unless it begins with Israeli and Palestinian Christians. As conference speaker Sami Awad said: “Is peace impossible? Of course! But

Jesus is about making the impossible possible.” ■

Lynne Hybels, co-founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois, is author of Nice Girls Don’t Change the World.



Peace in the Holy Land is really possible.

to be labeled as siding with one or the other—either with Jews as God’s chosen people or with Palestinians as victims of injustice. In recent years I have been judged by some as leaning too far toward the latter perspective.

In fact, I was severely criticized for speaking at the March 2012 “Christ at the Checkpoint” conference in Bethlehem. Because it was sponsored by Palestinian Christians, some people assumed it was anti-Israel. Prior to the conference, a writer for *The Jerusalem Post* called me a threat to the state of Israel; and some American Messianic Jews called me a heretic and an anti-Semite.

To be honest, as the conference approached I regretted having agreed to participate. Was it worth the controversy? And what if the



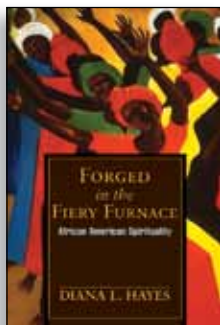
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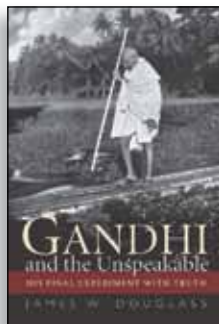
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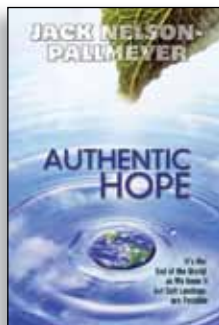
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THE FACE OF HATE

An interview with Rebecca Barrett-Fox, a scholar who finds the appalling, the unexpected, and the human inside Westboro Baptist Church.

TOPEKA'S WESTBORO BAPTIST CHURCH takes in-your-face to a whole new level. The church is nothing if not an equal opportunity offender, from its burning of both a Quran and an American flag on 9/11 to its signs proclaiming God's hatred for ... well, pretty much everyone. While Westboro, established by a lawyer named Fred Phelps in 1955, claims to be a Primitive Baptist Church, that denomination denounces the actions of the church as "deplorable." The church boasts of conducting 47,770 demonstrations since 1991 proclaiming its gospel of hate—while taunting on its website that the number zero represents the "nanoseconds of sleep that WBC members lose over your opinions and feeeeeellllllliiiiings."

From Rebecca Barrett-Fox's first visit to the church in 2004 until defending her dissertation "Pray Not for This People for Their Good" in 2010, the scholar became intimately acquainted with the people of Westboro in a way that few outsiders have. Barrett-Fox, now a professor at two Mennonite colleges in Kansas (Hesston and Bethel) and a former editor for *The Journal of Hate*



Studies, conducted intensive ethnographic research on the church, joining members at Sunday services, pickets at memorials for gay and lesbian people, and outside the Supreme Court when it ruled in favor of the church's right to demonstrate at military funerals. Freelance editor and writer Joanie Eppinga (eagleeyeediting.com) met Barrett-Fox through Gonzaga University's Institute for Hate Studies and interviewed her last April. —**The Editors**

Dennis Drenner/Getty Images



Noah Phelps-Roper, 8, left, and his brother Gabriel, 12, protest with family members from Westboro Baptist Church, outside the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in 2007.

Below: Westboro Baptist Church founder and pastor Fred Phelps.
At right: A church member protesting the premiere of the film *Red State* during the Sundance Film Festival last January.

Joanie Eppinga: How did you become involved with Westboro Baptist Church?

Rebecca Barrett-Fox: I had grown up with fundamentalist Christianity, with a particular emphasis on the scary parts; I was born in the decade of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. My mom did a wonderful thing for us, which was to send us to every religious service that was available, in part I think because she wanted us out of the house. When I came to the University of Kansas, a group of friends and I decided to go to every religious service we could find, and that included Westboro Baptist.

What made you decide to move forward with your study?

In some sense, I felt called to it. So I spent a lot of time grounding myself in Calvinism. It was a long, dark winter! I wanted to historicize Westboro teachings, because I sensed early on that there was a lineage here in American intellectual and theological history. Then, in 2010, I studied them intensely through their Supreme Court trial, and trav-



because God wants you.

After you'd been going to Westboro for a while, were you starting to develop relationships with their members?

I was. I think it was easy for me because, having a certain amount of fluency, I can speak the language of fundamentalist discourse and never posit myself as anything except an interested observer.

I saw some folks, particularly journalists, just get chewed up by members of the church. Research is admittedly hard with a group like this, because in America, our sense of Christianity is either Catholicism or a kind of "evangelical-prosperity-gospel feel-good-Billy-Graham crackery"—that's what Fred Phelps calls it. When you hear "Calvinism," it does not match what we think about religion in America today.

Did the actual church service resemble mainstream Christian worship?

I had seen them preaching hate-filled messages on the streets. What amazed me was

he's making, and you *want* to be part of that group. He would say, "As it says in ..." and then he would drop the scripture and one or two people would call it out, or sometimes he would say, "Jon, what's that Bible verse again?" And Jon better know it. It almost reminded me of law school, the level of pressure in a service.

Did children participate in this public biblical examination?

No, no. Neither did the women.

How were women expected to behave?

They can't cut their hair at all, and they wear head coverings during religious services. But they don't have to wear what I would consider modest clothing. I would sometimes see women wearing clothes I wouldn't let my daughter wear to church, like shorts from Victoria's Secret Pink collection, but also head coverings.

I was struck by how the congregation operated. It's almost eerie if you are used to other kinds of church services. Nobody makes a peep; there's no disruptive behavior, even from the kids.

How do church members discipline their children?

They are disciplined parents. I'm not saying that their kids don't get spanked, but I have never seen or heard of a child being spanked there. They just have very high expectations, and they communicate those expectations very effectively. And they are very much *with* their children. As soon as those children are born, they come back to church.

Do the children of the church seem happy?

Yes. In some ways, that's a disappointing finding, because you expect to see them being really unhappy. But the children who have left, the adult children of Fred Sr., talk about physical abuse and certainly mental abuse. Other members of the family say there wasn't abuse, including one member of the family who has left the church.

These generations of grandkids and now great-grandchildren in the church are pretty happy and very normal. They go to public school. They participate in track, play saxophone, though what they can do is limited. The kids are very smart.

"You of course can have conservative theology that doesn't end up here, proclaiming God's hate."

eled to the Supreme Court, though not with the church, to witness that process.

Westboro members say their purpose is not to convert souls. So why do they picket?

They say it's obedience to God. They feel like God told them to do this, so they're going to do it, regardless of public response. They use the same biblical passages used to justify any kind of preaching by any church: "Make it known to the world," that kind of scripture.

They would say they know their preaching won't save anybody. They are absolute predestinarians who believe that God chooses not just salvation and damnation, but everything. Not a sparrow will fall without it being God's will. These beliefs, when taken together, make up the core of hyper-Calvinism. You are not saved because you heard them preaching; you are only saved

that they were saying the same thing in the church service—how do people come back Sunday after Sunday to hear this? Nothing new is being presented. I saw a lot of circling the wagons, with sermons about things like Noah and the flood and how only eight people got on the ark. This church is the ark, so if you're a part of this church you're getting on. The sermons are actually very typical of themes addressed in Calvinist teaching: questions of how you know that *you* are in or how you know that *they* are out.

So the attraction is the appeal of being part of the "in group."

Exactly. And I could see the attractiveness of that in a world that is fragmented and scary, especially if you are not okay with doubt or gray areas.

Fred Phelps' preaching is really a rhetorical act. You *want* to laugh at the jokes



How does the group finance traveling to all those protests?

Everybody pays their own way. They are Calvinists in the very traditional way: They work really hard. They don't pass a collection basket during services, and if you try to donate money to them, they won't accept it. But the church's travel budget is a quarter million dollars a year. A lot of them have careers in law, health care, and nursing, as sonogram technicians, and in computer science and robotics. Almost everybody has an advanced degree.

Fred Senior is a lawyer, and 11 of his 13 children are lawyers; they have a family law practice. If you looked at it, you would think it was a progressive firm. They do tribal law in the area, some family law. They won't represent you in a divorce if you are in your first marriage because they don't believe in divorce. But if you are in your second marriage, that doesn't count anyway, so they will represent you. And they do a lot with

immigration. Fred Sr. actually made his career as a civil rights litigator; he won settlements on behalf of African Americans. He reopened *Brown vs. Board of Education* in Topeka, and won.

I once heard somebody say that being in court against him was like being in a knife fight. He was disbarred for unethical behavior, once at the state level and once at the federal level. At the state level he badgered a witness—attacking her personal life, especially her sexual behavior. At the federal level, he made disparaging remarks about justices.

Did you ever feel drawn into the church's perspective?

There was never a moment where I thought, gosh, let me join this church, but the appeal of the community—I could see that. I also think that church members create a culture that makes it uncomfortable to leave, and that becomes a high hurdle.

Because if you leave you are basically excommunicated?

They wouldn't say "excommunicated." They'll take you off the church rolls, so you *are* excommunicated, but it amounts to more than simply excommunication from church services; it is de facto shunning because, as [Fred Phelps' daughter] Shirley has said, "We don't have time to talk to people who aren't part of the church." Shirley has one son who has left, Josh, who has publicly said, "I would like to have my mom be part of my life," though he doesn't agree with her theology.

So Shirley's response to her son's departure has been silence?

Oh no! She told everybody publicly that she'd just as soon line up all of her kids and punch them in their noses as let Josh back into her house, because she would be such a bad parent to give the message that it's okay to leave this church.

Do you have the sense that she has any grief around his absence?

I can't imagine how there couldn't be. But if you go into Shirley's house, on the refrigerator there are pictures of all of Shirley's kids in foam picture frames, all in birth order, only Josh's is gone—and no one has pushed the pictures of his two surrounding siblings closer together. Instead, there's just a hole.

Shirley would say that he's clearly not one of the elect since he left the church, so she's not going to be in heaven with him anyway. For her to want Josh there would be like telling God, "You are wrong about this." They probably don't have an expectation that all of them will be chosen for salvation. That's, again, that cold calculus of Calvinism, that maybe makes it easier when family members walk away.

Being a parent, you can't imagine not crying at the loss of your child.

And for them, a loss doesn't just mean a loss in this life; it also means eternal damnation. Among the Amish, there are ways to negotiate what "shunned" means, but there aren't in this congregation. So it does seem very, very sad.

What has been your attitude as you've interacted with church members?

I don't think I can get to an understanding of this group that is complete if I don't think of them as full human beings. And I bear in mind that this group of 70 people is not going to go on forever; no church ever does. As painful as their behavior is, we can absorb it. They are not going to bring down American culture.

Did it wear on you, being with them that much?

No. I had a couple of very deliberate strategies, because some days were very long, and missing my home congregation was hard.

"I don't think if you ignore them they will go away, because they are not motivated primarily by a response."

Sometimes, my husband and kids would come to Topeka. One strategy of ethnographic research is to have someone with you. That way you can ask someone else, "Am I crazy, or is that what I'm hearing?"

How did you define your role among them?

There were those months of warmth, reciprocity, and participation. Maybe one of the cutest moments was when I brought cornbread to a potluck lunch. I said, "It's John Calvin's grandma's recipe." They looked at me and realized it was a joke. They cut it into little pieces so everybody could get some.

But the tone of our relationship had to vary from circumstance to circumstance. I couldn't be palling around on the picket line.

What is the role of empathy in your research?

In the 1980s, feminist ethnographers started saying: We all know that all that stuff about sheer objectivity is not true. We have an emotional connection, and not talking about it is denying a traditional form of women's language. One of the central tenets of feminist ethnography is that ethnography should be for the use and benefit of the subjects—for example, women survivors of marital abuse.

But what happens when you have some empathy with a person whose goals you can't share, don't share, won't share, whose position you just generally don't respect? Given my personality, it's not that easy for me to

turn that off. You want to connect, you want to be approved of. It was helpful for me to take new people to church services with me. I didn't become desensitized because I could see the horror in their faces.

Taking careful field notes was helpful too. I was counting. How many times did they say "fag" today? Putting my own names to the types of people church members were sending to hell—Catholics, queer people, soldiers—was helpful: That person he's talking about, that's my friend Karen, my friend Alicia. We've learned that if you know someone who is gay or lesbian, you're less likely to

be homophobic. When you put a face to this hatred, you just can't do it anymore.

That's probably also true of your relationship with the Westboro members.

Yes, it is. You just can't say these people are just awful anymore. What they *do* is awful, but it also illuminates how many other awful things are done under the guise of conservative Christianity. I don't want to make a blanket statement about all conservative Christian churches—what I'm really talking about is the homophobic/political branch. You can have conservative theology that doesn't end up here, proclaiming God's hate.

Sociologist Kathleen Blee warns about using empathy either falsely or deceptively, or allowing it to turn off your critical thinking. I had the benefit of Blee's insights.

What sustained you emotionally throughout the course of your research?

Anybody could have objectively gathered this data. If my heart was not attuned to the situation, there are insights I would not have seen. I've cried in my field work, Sunday after Sunday, sobbed in the car. What kind of a person am I, if I go to a funeral and I don't do that? If I'm turning my heart off in research, I'm turning my heart off to other things that are valuable to know. I had that commitment and that community of support that made it possible for me to do it without losing it.

What does the Westboro Baptist Church

activity, and our response to it, say about our culture?

It has illuminated for me the homophobia of some forms of conservative Christianity, and I find that far more dangerous than Westboro Baptist. Westboro makes those other guys look reasonable; conservative Christians make efforts to distinguish their own anti-gay message from Westboro Baptists'. But Westboro is clearly a historic part of Christianity. There is a long strain of hyper-Calvinism in this country. Broader conservative Christianity does believe that God acts divinely in negative ways. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes are said to be God's punishment for Pokemon or voodoo or whatever evil thing Japan or Haiti or New Orleans has done.

What struck you about the way people responded to Westboro?

Some of the most progressive people fell for their homophobic and misogynistic taunts and responded with hostility. I was discouraged by how normative that kind of behavior was. Yet I don't feel discouraged in my faith at all. It's not as if I'm looking at this situation and saying, "Oh no, what's wrong with the world?" I looked at this and said, "Passionate, devoted, intelligent people get led in the wrong direction."

How do you think people should respond?

I don't think if you ignore them they will go away, because they are not motivated primarily by a response. I think what's more important is showing solidarity for your community: Make sure that those being targeted are loved and supported.

What was the most valuable thing you learned from your research?

I was able to see church members more as complete people and people in a process, and that made me feel hopeful. I think about St. Paul. Look where he started: stoning people, doing more damage than Westboro Baptists have done. There's hope here for transformation. Westboro Baptists are fond of saying that "the arm of God cannot be shortened." That is, you can do nothing to make God do less than God will do; you cannot lessen God's ability to save. I try to apply that concept to how I see others—that I cannot limit them, that I cannot "shorten" their potential to be loved by God, to be people of love. ■



Wild Goose Festival photo

Chasing the Wild Goose

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, / the world offers itself to your imagination, / calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting / over and over announcing your place / in the family of things.

—From “Wild Geese”
by Mary Oliver

LATE JUNE. SCHOOL’S out. The days are long, their pace slowed—languid and languorous, in the best sense of those descriptors. Could there be a better time to embark on a wild goose chase? I think not.

As luck would have it, just after the summer solstice this June, fans of such adventures—devotees of that sacred, untamable squawking

Celtic Christianity.

The idea (and it is a provocative one) is that rather than a dove, the Holy Spirit is more like one of those big, gray geese—wild, unruly, coming and going as it pleases, announcing its arrival with honking, bluster, and ample attitude.

Rather than the gentle dove, this (alleged) ancient Celtic image of the Holy Spirit is raucous—as uncaged as the wind that lifts its muscular wings.

ORGANIZERS OF THE Wild Goose Festival, which runs June 21 to 24 in Shakori Hills, North Carolina (not far from Durham), describe the eponymous fowl and its spiritual

our questions, and the other. In that spirit, in an informal setting, and in the context of creative and respectful relationships, we invite you to imagine a new world with us.”

Hebrew scripture teaches us that the Spirit of God was not in the earthquake or the windstorm or the fire, but instead in the whisper—that still, small voice. Most assuredly it is. But I cannot help believing that every now and again the Spirit arrives with flapping wings and honking, too. Like that old gray goose.

In this acrimonious election year, as wars and rumors of wars rage around us, as the economy dips and stumbles like a drunkard and climate change makes the idea of a temperate North Carolina summer evening seem like the stuff of magical thinking, I’m game for a wild goose chase.

As for me and my house, we’ll be packing our flip flops, pup tents, and a few pairs of finely calibrated spiritual binoculars and heading for the farm, in search of An Gé Fiáin and the startling grace with which it surely will descend on the party.

Honk Honk! ■

Cathleen Falsani, web editor for *Sojourners*, is author of *Belieber: Fame, Faith, and the Heart of Justin Bieber*.

I cannot help believing that every now and again the Spirit arrives with flapping wings and honking, too.

bird—will gather on a farm in North Carolina for a weekend’s worth of music, art, the exchange of ideas, and the pursuit of the Spirit at the (aptly named) Wild Goose Festival.

The fest, a cousin of the U.K.’s venerable Greenbelt festival now in its second year on this side of the pond, takes its name from the Irish An Gé Fiáin (“the wild goose,” pronounced “On Geh Fee-an”), which some folks believe is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit traceable to ancient

import this way: “The Wild Goose ... evokes unpredictability, beauty, and grace. The festival resonates with this image because we recognize that in the current climate of religious and political division and lack of civility, embracing the creative and open nature of our faith is perhaps our greatest asset for rebuilding and strengthening our relationships with each other, with our enemies, with our stories,





DETROIT

Angela Glover Blackwell believes in Detroit's future, and she has a vision for how to get there. Failure is not an option.

by ELIZABETH PALMBERG

Volunteers in the Summer in the City program paint a mural on a wall near Detroit's Eastern (Farmers) Market.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT advocate Angela Glover Blackwell makes no bones about why PolicyLink, the nonprofit she leads, held its 2,500-person Equity Summit in Detroit last November: "Detroit represented the problem and the hope."

It's the problem because it's "a classic example of what happens when you don't keep up with the needs of a changing population." It's the hope because it's a hub of fresh energy—from government, foundations, community groups, and business—aiming to "build a future based on the people who are going to *be* the future."

Jim West





**“By the end of this decade,
the majority of those under 18
will be children of color.” —ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL**

In fact, in Detroit and nationwide, a racialized narrative that prompts the U.S. to “throw away its cities” is hurting everyone. Blackwell points out: “If you’re a white family wanting to use public education in an urban area, you’re likely to be disappointed because we have abandoned those areas because of our racial divide. If you’re a young, urban white professional wanting to use public transportation, you’re likely to be disappointed—our disinvestment in urban transportation systems has placed all wanting to use them at a disadvantage.”

The country can’t afford to keep abandoning communities like this, she emphasizes. As the U.S. faces economic challenges such as “a vulnerable middle class and how to be competitive in a global economy,” it can’t hope to move forward if it ignores the demographic reality that “by the end of this decade, the majority of those under 18 will be children of color—black, Latino, Asian, Native American. The future depends on what happens with those children. Equity, in addition to being a moral imperative, has become an economic one.”

BY “EQUITY,” BLACKWELL means doing what it takes to change the undeniable, unacceptable fact that, in the U.S., “where you live has become a proxy for opportunity. Where you live determines whether you have a good school; whether you live near jobs or public transportation that can connect you to jobs; and, if you’re lucky enough to own a home, whether you have any value that you can extract from that home” to withstand a health crisis or start a business.

People don’t “have to have racial hatred in their hearts to be complicit in allowing people to be stuck in communities of concentrated poverty,” Blackwell points out. Rather, the problem is a legacy of the U.S. history of residential segregation: “As the racial barrier was removed, people who were black and middle class could move out, but so many people who were poor could not—because of continuing discrimination, because of the poverty that was associated with poor education, job preparation, and access to jobs.”

“If we have continued as a nation to build gated communities, taking political power, job opportunities, and infrastructure investments to the suburbs and leaving cities with very little, we’re perpetuating the legacy of

racism,” Blackwell says plainly. “But people don’t have to beat themselves up about that legacy: They can just acknowledge it and know that we need to correct it; not only because it was a moral injustice, but because if we don’t, the future for the nation is not strong.”

Equity, Blackwell says, “goes beyond the conversation of equal opportunity and asks: What do we want for all and what will it take for all to get there?” History shows that it’s possible to “have an equitable recovery that allows *all* to benefit,” she continues, citing the example of California in the 1950s. Starting with a post-World War II population marked by a 25 percent poverty rate, both Republican and Democrat state administrations invested in health and education from kindergarten on up, “building the best community college and higher education system that the nation has ever seen. By 1962 *Newsweek* declared it ‘the nation’s number one state.’ That was an equity investment. We can do it in Detroit.”

ONE CRITICAL AREA for investment is infrastructure, Blackwell says, a point especially relevant to a Rust Belt city such as Detroit: “We need to think about what the next industries are. How does Detroit lead in the “green” industry the way that it led in the automobile industry? Detroit, in its heyday, had an infrastructure that could not be rivaled. It really knew how to move cars around the world, and it had a public transportation system, streetcars up and down Woodward Avenue, that everybody could depend on to get to jobs. Over the years, Detroit allowed that to crumble. Detroit, and too many places like Detroit, will not be able to come back if they don’t invest in their infrastructure—and in their people at the same time.” If the city invests in “a pipeline so that low-income people of color can get jobs” building infrastructure, Blackwell says, there’s an “amazing opportunity for double bottom-line results.”

Part of the investment Blackwell is talking about comes from the federal government, such as the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant money Detroit has won from the Department of Transportation. But one of Blackwell’s main points is that “to achieve

Continued on Page 24

When Blackwell talks about that future, she means one founded on the people who live in Detroit now, “not some imaginary people who aren’t here—and not based on trying to attract people who have decided they don’t want to be here.” Over the last half century, fewer and fewer white people have decided to live in Detroit. This trend started in the mid-20th century as more and more people of color *did* live there, and continued over the last three decades as many people of color also started to move away. In the 2010 census, Detroit registered at just over 700,000 people, down from 1.2 million in 1980. Those that remain face a stark economic situation: 34.5 percent live below the poverty level, Blackwell points out, compared to 15 percent nationally.

For many, Detroit is not just the epitome of the Rust Belt, but of a black-and-white narrative that is so rote as to seem invisible, or invincible: Whites flee an urban area, African Americans in poverty remain (more than 80 percent of Detroit’s 2010 population was African American). But for Blackwell, the story and statistics are never just black and white. She points out that, in Detroit, poverty includes not just 37 percent of African Americans, but also “32.5 percent of Latinos, 33 percent of whites—because so many white people who live in Detroit have been left behind—and 47 percent of Asians; that represents a concentration of the Hmong population.”

Ryan Rodrick Beller

DETROIT

AN ASSAULT ON LOCAL DEMOCRACY

Michigan's "Emergency Manager" law and Detroit's future • by BILL WYLIE-KELLERMANN

A BIG CHANGE came down in Detroit this spring. Under sanction of Michigan's Emergency Manager Law (Public Act 4), on April 4 the city council authorized a "consent agreement" ceding its authority over the budget to a shadow body of corporate leaders (emergency manager by committee). For some, this bodes fast-track redevelopment and downsizing the city. For others, it means the end of collective bargaining. For Detroiters, it's the blunt face of political disenfranchisement.

Although Public Act 4 is being challenged for its constitutionality in court and for its political legitimacy in a statewide repeal effort, the assault on local democracy remains in full tilt. Triggered by financial insolvency, governor-appointed emergency managers are empowered from above to remove top administrators and elected officials, void union contracts, cut and remake budgets, overturn local ordinances, and sell off assets. The "consent agreement" keeps the mayor and city council in place, but vastly disempowered.

But, apart from the vacant land so plentiful these days in the city, are there assets in Detroit to be desired and seized? The water works may quickly be sold or controlled by a suburban arrangement. It is one of the few revenue-generating departments in the city, and it is among the key infrastructures of white urban sprawl. Then there is the riverfront itself, and the gem-of-an-island city park, Belle Isle, which casino-owners and developers have eyed lasciviously for years. There are newly built or rehabbed schools sought by for-profit charters. There is the privatization of services or entire city departments. And, of course, the deregulated clearing of the way for projects yet to come.

Only Michigan cities with black majorities have had Public Act 4 imposed upon them. And none of them have seen financial turnaround, but only been left for worse. Already Benton Harbor, Highland Park, Pontiac, Flint, and Ecorse are under emergency managers. Add Detroit and more than half of the African-American population of the state is ruled by non-elected governments.

Other states are waiting to follow. Detroit is the big test to see if it will "work."

Public schools have been under an emergency manager for three years, which has left them with a larger deficit while building or rehabbing schools that will be turned over to charters, both for-profit and nonprofit. The system has been divided into two districts, one with the better schools, the other a statewide district for failing schools (at this point

Detroit is the only system in this district).

For two years, the mayor had already been spearheading a plan to "downsize Detroit," in accord with the realities of white flight, job flight, tax flight, and capital flight. In general that's meant, with corporate support, concentrating resources in certain, mostly center city, neighborhoods, and pulling the plug (schools, churches, and services) in others, where homeowners and neighbors are left to fend for themselves.

The role of the philanthropic foundations in this has been mixed at best. Although they are not democratically accountable to the city or its neighborhoods, they exercise

Counting Detroit, more than half of the African-American population of the state is ruled by non-elected governments.

substantial planning and development authority. They collaborate with one another and with substantial nonprofits in selecting neighborhoods to be saved—while others are left de facto to their fates.

Where are things headed? One might envision two Detroit: one in the central city and along the waterfront, with a few additional pockets—substantially white and essentially gated. And another of more-desperate outlying black neighborhoods fighting for resources. Not exactly equitable development.

Yet there is indeed much hope from below. And there the future lies. For decades Detroiters have met economic devastation with creativity, turning vacant land into an urban agriculture movement and neighborhoods into peace zones. They have been reinventing work and reimagining economy as community-based and community-building forms.

Now, with local democracy under assault, not only will they need to fight to reclaim their voting rights, but also to reimagine democracy at every level. They will need to create new structures of accountability and new forms of urban rule to build a future for Detroit that is both equitable and free. ■

Bill Wylie-Kellermann, a writer and community activist, is pastor of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Detroit.



"In the U.S., where you live has become a proxy for opportunity."

sense," Blackwell says. "If you want children to thrive, they have to begin school ready to learn, the schools have to be good, and the children need to have mentors and adults who are looking out for them.

"Now we're seeing Promise Neighborhoods begin to pop up and thrive all across the country. The federal government is making planning and implementation money available, but it is matched by private philanthropy and the energy of people in communities who understand their neighborhoods." Blackwell mentions a two-neighborhood Promise Neighborhoods coalition in Detroit that has won a federal grant to develop its plan and compete for funding to make that plan a reality. The program's website shows that the two Detroit neighborhoods—Osborn, which is predominantly African American, and Clark Park, whose population is mostly Latino—have assembled project partners including community groups, the Detroit Public Schools, teachers unions, and the Skillman Foundation.

A KEY PART of the inequity that Detroit and the U.S. must take on, Blackwell says, is how the economic and physical layout of communities helps make or break our health. She gives the example of affluent Berkeley Hills, California, whose residents on average live 15 years longer than people in West Oakland, less than five miles away: "This is a function of racial inequality in America."

While the state of Michigan's overall obesity rate is a problematic 30.5 percent, Blackwell says, the number is "much, much higher within the black and Latino community. Think what it's like for a mother to go to the doctor with her child and the doctor says the child needs to eat a healthier diet and get lots of exercise—and then she returns to a community in which there are no farmers markets, no full-service grocery stores, only corner stores that sell liquor, potato chips, and soda."

Blackwell cites a Pennsylvania state initiative that has catalyzed 5,000 jobs and neighborhood fresh food availability for nearly half a million people, and which PolicyLink has helped scale up to a federal Healthy Food Finance Program "that has millions of dollars already on the streets,

getting more grocery stores across the nation." Blackwell works to put homegrown veggies into the mix; on the day I interviewed her, PolicyLink was hosting a 1,500-participant webinar on urban agriculture. Also essential to healthy communities, Blackwell says, are safe places to exercise and an end to the practice of putting highways by poor communities, which exacerbates asthma.

Ultimately, whether Detroit and the country at large pursue racial equity and invest in communities are matters that go far beyond the well-being of individuals—the survival of our cities, and even our nation, is at stake. Warning that neither a community nor a nation divided against itself can stand, Blackwell is concerned that an aging white population might disinvest in the future: "In this nation, 80 percent of those over 65 are white and 46.5 percent of those under 18 are of color, but some places have a bigger racial age divide than others. Two of the widest divides are in Arizona and Nevada." She's pointed out that, not coincidentally, Arizona ranks very low in public education spending and very high in anti-immigrant sentiment.

"We have to make sure that we're creating pathways to prosperity for all Americans, not just some," she says. And she won't take no for an answer: "We are coming out of a period in which too many people had given up on being able to pull out of poverty. That phrase coined by Ronald Reagan, 'we fought a war on poverty and poverty won,' caught hold, even though it was not true." In reality, says Blackwell, when "we fought a war on poverty, we learned a lot about what works, and we quit before we were able to implement everything that we knew could work."

Blackwell has little patience for defeatism: "People say, 'We can't do this; we have a deficit.' The United States of America is not a poor country, and it needs to stop acting like one. We have the richest people in the world living here. We need to make choices."

If Angela Glover Blackwell teaches anything, it's that there are many choices and many paths toward building a better future. But if we want strong communities, economies, and even people, settling for inequity is not an option. ■

Elizabeth Palmberg is an associate editor of Sojourners.

Continued from Page 22

results, many people have to coordinate their work" together—governments, charities, and community groups.

One key player, Blackwell says, is the philanthropic sector; she cites involvement of foundations, such as Ford, Kresge, Kellogg, and Skillman, as a reason for hope in Detroit. Another important part of the mix is community groups. As an example of how they are working together with federal involvement, Blackwell cites several promising investments in jobs in Detroit, including Michigan's Earn and Learn program, which combines continuing education and 30 weeks of subsidized part-time employment, and which is slated to place 1,000 people in full-time jobs, many in retrofitting buildings, by the end of next year. "For a young person in Detroit, it breaks your heart to see abandoned neighborhoods and able-bodied, ambitious men, who would like to do more for their families, spend days on the corner," Blackwell says. "Having a program that says you can do better—the pride, the hope that brings is just fantastic."

Public-private partnerships are also central to one of Blackwell's main examples of racial equity, the national Promise Neighborhoods program. Modeled on New York City's widely praised Harlem Children's Zone, Promise Neighborhoods aims to offer a comprehensive suite of supports to children most in need of them. "It's common

Ryan Rodrick Beller

DETROIT

A FARM GROWS IN MOTOWN

Detroiters often use the phoenix rising from the ashes as a metaphor for the city's resilience. Worms might be just as apt a symbol this time around • by KORLA MASTERS

THE CITY OF DETROIT has several thousand vacant houses, but Darryl Howard has at least as many worms. Howard is an intern with Earthworks Urban Farm, a program of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen on Detroit's East Side. He dreams of running a small business that supplies worms to farms that dot the city landscape.

As Howard and his colleagues (invertebrate and vertebrate alike) know, worms work with materials that, from the outside, appear spent—and surprise us by producing rich, healthy soil. As he digs his hands into the dirt, still in the phase between food scraps and soil, a smile breaks across Howard's face. "This is how I feed myself, my family, my community, and the world."

Detroiters often use the phoenix rising from the ashes as a metaphor for the city's resilience; in its 300-year history, Detroit has gone through several periods of bad times and has come back each time. Yet worms might be just as apt a symbol this time around.

**Detroit
could come
very close
to feeding
itself.**

Detroit could come very close to feeding itself. According to the Detroit Food Policy Council, farming less than half of the vacant publicly held land in the city could yield three-quarters of the vegetables and almost half of the fruit consumed by

Detroit residents. In a city that bleeds money when buying food, that could be enormously stabilizing.

Furthermore, the economic impact is far from the only benefit. There is cultural and social power in growing food for your community.

The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network cultivates that power alongside the food it grows. Hanifa Adjuman roots herself deeply in this call to cultivation. As education coordinator for the network, she is steeped in the story of farming in Detroit, bringing elders with decades of experience together with youth for whom agricultural work carries reminders of their slave forebears.

A frequent reaction from new participants is, "We thought slavery was over." Adjuman sees her work as healing work, explaining that "now we're doing it for *us*." She stresses the importance of African-American people understanding that people have the power to provide for community sustenance. The network has created a food security curriculum that raises the complex issues, painful and hopeful,

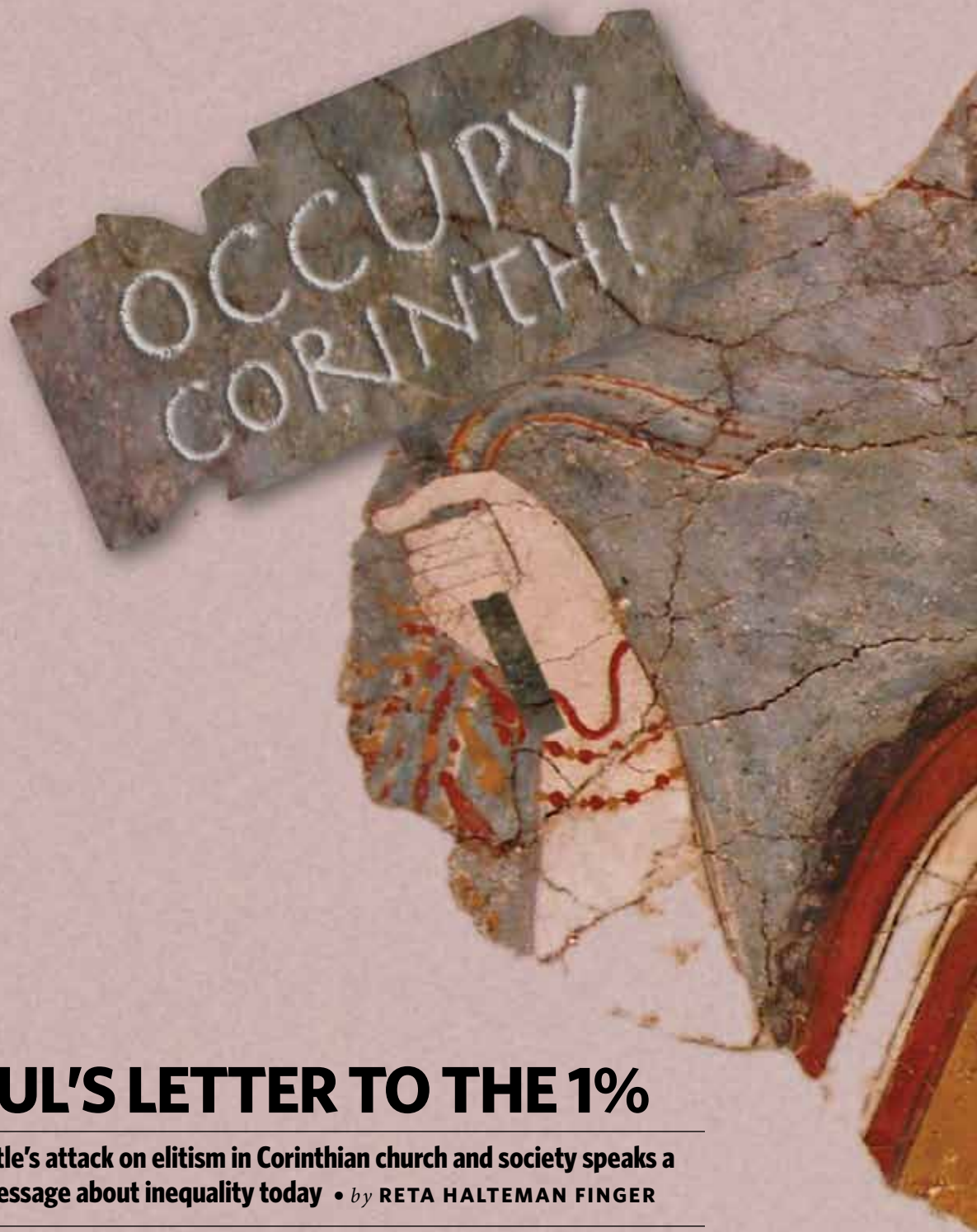


A boy waters a garden for Growing Healthy Kids, a program sponsored by Earthworks Urban Farm.

that surround agriculture in Detroit. These transformative conversations embrace the decades-long history of farming in Detroit, long practiced to put food on the table prior to the declaration of an "urban ag" movement. What is important, Adjuman insists, is that youth know that "this is *good* work, sustaining on so many levels: mind, body, and spirit."

His hands full of dirt, peels, and worms, Darryl Howard muses, "This called me." Becoming rich soil is a process of transformation, rather than death. Worms are not conspicuous like phoenixes, but in the process of creation, good soil is a thing of immense beauty. ■

Korla Masters is a Lutheran Volunteer Corps member at Spirit of Hope, a Lutheran/Episcopal congregation in Detroit.



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE 1%

The apostle's attack on elitism in Corinthian church and society speaks a clear message about inequality today • by RETA HALTEMAN FINGER

EACH SUNDAY, IN many churches across North America, congregants hear these words preparing them for communion: “The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread ...”

However, few churchgoers kneeling for bread and wine at the altar may know that these words in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 are set in a longer section (11:17-34) that begins sharply: “Now in the following instructions, I do *not* commend you, because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse!” Paul continues the attack in verse 20: “When you come together it is not really to eat the *Lord's* supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your *own* supper, and one goes hungry, and another becomes drunk” (emphasis added).

What Paul describes sounds more like a food fight in a high school cafeteria than our solemn rituals. Have we missed something in this text?

This article isn't mainly about food. It's about inequality—the 99 percent versus the 1 percent. But when you live in the Roman Empire where most inhabitants live at or below subsistence, earning enough daily bread is the main thing you think about.

A longtime friend, George McClain, and I are presently finishing a curriculum simulating a house

Mural in ruins of ancient Corinth, slightly augmented.



church planted by Paul in Corinth during the years 50 to 51 C.E. We owe much to the research of biblical and classical scholars and archeologists on power relations in the Roman Empire. This “empire-critical” method examines the sociological, political, religious, and economic structures that underpin first century Rome. Such struc-

Paul tells the privileged 1 percent to share it or give it up for the sake of the entire body of Christ.

tures contrast starkly with the “kingdom of God” as proclaimed by Jesus and his apostle Paul.

To begin with, Roman aristocrats detest democracy. They assume they are superior to all other people and thus have the right to rule over them. Gradations of hierarchy exist everywhere, from emperor to senators to knights to the lesser aristocracy to ordinary citizens to freeborn noncitizens to freedpersons to slaves. There is little upward social mobility; stability and hierarchy are valued more highly. Democracy means chaos.

Such stability and hierarchy are best maintained through a system of inequality called “patronage.” No one survives without a patron in a slightly higher class to provide help—with social connections, economic opportunities, or legal counsel. In return, the client publicly honors the patron. Clients themselves are patrons to persons below them. Throughout the empire, a myriad of such pyramids operate to maintain both inequality and social stability. Priests and temples buttress hierarchy through civil religion. The emperor is the representative of the gods.

To immerse ourselves in the material remains of this culture, several of us visited Greece and the Corinthia in 2009. David Pettegrew, my archeologist colleague and friend, walked us through weeds growing over ancient Corinth to the ruins of a first-century villa, perhaps like one owned by a patron of a house church. We pondered the ruins of the Asklepieion, a community healing center where banquets for Corinthian elites would have been held—meals Paul considered “the table of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:19-21). We splashed our feet in the water at the harbor at Cenchreae, where Phoebe

led a house church and from where she carried Paul’s letter to Rome (Romans 16:1-2).

PAUL NAMES FOUR people in Corinth who probably led house churches: Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), Crispus and Gaius (1:14), and Stephanas (1:16; 16:17). Unlike his letters to Thessalonika, where no leaders are

named, these people may represent patrons who provided a house for the believers to meet and, possibly, food for the daily communal meal.

While in Ephesus, Paul hears about problems in Corinth from “Chloe’s people,” so we chose to simulate her house church. Eighteen characters are divided into the four factions Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12—“those of Paul,” “those of Apollos,” “those of Cephas,” and “those of Christ.”

How did these divisions and quarrels arise? After Paul planted churches in Corinth, he left for more church-planting in Ephesus. Apollos, an eloquent preacher from Alexandria, arrived later and also attracted a following, probably those with more status, wealth, and education. We assume “Chloe’s people” generally supported Paul’s viewpoint, since they appealed to him for help. We don’t know if Cephas (the Apostle Peter) ever came there, but this faction could include Jesus-Jews more conservative than Paul. We characterized “those in Christ” as charismatic slaves, mostly women, who have been transformed from “bodies” without honor to persons of dignity and worth, seeking equality with the other believers.

As we role-played these factions, first in a seminary class and then with laypeople in Sunday school, we saw how issues of social class and status dominate the letter. On almost every issue, Paul tells the privileged “1 percent” to share it or give it up for the sake of the entire body of Christ. It is the core of Jesus’ self-emptying gospel. Here are a few examples:

CRAZY, UPSIDE-DOWN LOGIC

1 Corinthians 1:18-3:23

Paul immediately challenges the “not

many” among the believers who are “wise by human standards ... powerful ... and of noble birth” (1:26). He lifts up the less educated and “weak ... low and despised in the world” (1:27-28). Waving a cross, the standard instrument of torture, Paul insists that “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1:23). This is God’s “wisdom”—that God’s son should be so shamed and despised by the “rulers of this age” that they executed him as a terrorist. And these are the rulers the “noble” members are sucking up to!

Apollos may have preached the same message. But he was an orator from Alexandria, perhaps from the school of Philo, the great Jewish wisdom teacher. Apollos’ eloquence may have attracted some lower-level officials hanging onto upper-class privileges by their fingertips. Here was a chance to gain more clients to provide them additional public honor.

Paul insists that he and Apollos agree and are not rivals (3:5-6). But the factions are still spiritual babies, still “of the flesh,” full of quarreling and jealousy (3:1-4).

SEX, LAWSUITS, AND BANQUETS

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20

Chloe’s people have reported that one man in the church has a sexual relationship with his stepmother—his father’s wife (5:1). Because Paul says this behavior conflicts with Roman practice, one scholar, Bruce Winter, argues that the father is alive—in which case the son *is* transgressing the law of honor. But the family is wealthy, and the father does not want to call public attention to this shame. Nor do the Corinthian assemblies excommunicate the son; he is their patron and benefactor. Paul connects greed and robbery to sexual immorality three times (5:10, 11; 6:10).

Paul probably discusses lawsuits here (6:1-8) because of this legal mess. But in any case, only elite patrons of the church could file a grievance in a Roman court; persons of lower rank may not sue a superior. Instead, Paul insists internal problems be brought before “the saints” (6:1-6): “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another?” This is very risky for those with power and privilege. What if the wisest person in a house church is a slave? Patrons cannot allow



slaves to think they deserve as much respect as their owners!

Paul then curtails the privileges of all elite men in 6:12-20. They say, “all things are lawful for me.” The context is the elite banquets—the over-eating, over-drinking, and “hook-ups” for dessert. But how can a client in their house church challenge his patron about attending these banquets?

Gender inequality pervades the empire, but Paul argues for equal faithfulness in marriage and for the value of the physical body because God has bodily “raised the Lord and will raise [our bodies] by his power” (6:13b-20). In fact, the greedy, drunkards, or the sexually immoral should not even attend the community’s agape meals! (5:11).

THE RISK OF EATING IDOL-MEAT

1 Corinthians 8-10

Here Paul again addresses elite members of the church. Only they can afford to eat from the top of the food chain, but he issues two instructions that curtail their privileges. Although it’s okay to eat whatever food is offered at a private dinner, if someone there—most likely a Christian slave—tells you it was offered in sacrifice, don’t eat it for her sake (10:27-29).

Second, Paul absolutely forbids public banquets. Temple banquets reinforce hierarchy. Diners are seated according to rank,

all financial support from the Corinthians (9:1-7, 12, 15). Paul knows it would come from the church patrons, making him beholden to them rather than to the majority of poor laborers and slaves. He would be co-opted into the unequal patronal system, which opposes Christ’s good news of equal inclusion (9:16-18).

Instead, Paul becomes a lower-class handworker in his rented tent-making shop (Acts 18:1-3). He sees this self-emptying of privilege as the core of Jesus’ gospel. But by offering himself as an example of what Jesus did, he angers his would-be patrons. It would be a public honor to have Teacher Paul as their house-philosopher. In response, some reject his apostleship (a painful situation Paul laments in 2 Corinthians 10-13).

NOT A SUPPER OF THE LORD!

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The context of chapters 11 to 14 is a worship service. Elite persons do not work for a living, so they arrive at a patron’s house for supper in the late afternoon and recline on couches in the dining room. All laborers must work until sunset. By that time, the food is gone, and the early diners are drunk (11:20-21). This is eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, says Paul. It is not “discerning the body” (11:29). That is why those not getting supper “are weak and ill and some have died” (verse 30).

The text presupposes a full meal that begins with a bread-breaking ritual and ends with a ritual of the cup—in honor of the Lord Jesus. The confusing words “homes” and “at home” in verses 22 and 34 are literally “house” in Greek, here meaning the “house church.”

Paul uses the example of Jesus’ Last Supper to play on the word “body.” Jesus

shared bread as a symbol of his own physical body *and* his body of disciples gathered with him (verses 23-25). The elite members of the house church must remember the “death of the Lord” (verse 26) so they can commit socio-political suicide by waiting to eat a late supper with people they deem inferior. But Paul is adamant. If you are not eating *together*, it is not a Jesus-Supper. You are eating your own suppers and you humiliate those who have nothing (verses 20-22).

From the patchwork evidence of 2 Corinthians, we know that Paul’s letter was not well-received—at least not by patrons or their clients whom Paul ironically calls “super-apostles” (11:4-6). The “1 percent” of Christians in Corinth were no more willing to give up their privileges than most of us today want to give up privileges of wealth, class, race, or education. The secular Occupy movement is calling attention to a staggering economic gap between the 1 percent and the 99 percent in America. Is it possible that, in their struggle to proclaim the moral bankruptcy of such inequality, the Occupiers are partaking of more authentic “suppers of the Lord” than many of us kneeling in the sanctuary? ■

What Paul describes sounds like a food fight in a high school cafeteria.

with better food for the higher-ups. Besides the dessert course mentioned above, these “good old boy” meals are times of networking—strengthening business ties and reinforcing patronage relations. For Paul, this is to sit down at the table of demons (10:14-22), the table of the domination system that God opposes. But by not attending these banquets, Christian patrons would cut themselves off from their pagan peers and lose honor. They will resist.

For this reason, Paul includes chapter 9—about a privilege he himself gave up for the sake of the gospel. He has refused

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CAN THESE BONES LIVE?

In Guatemala, 44,000 people were “disappeared” during decades of war. Now workers there seek to resurrect a buried history and human dignity. • by EMILIE TERESA SMITH

The spirit of the Lord set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. —Ezekiel 37:1-2

IT IS A MARCH morning in Guatemala City: sunny, cool, windy. I walk down a dry, dusty lane, out along a finger of land jutting perilously between ravine and ravine. To one side, vultures circle in lazy spirals on the updraft, watching everything down below—waiting. We are near the garbage dump and the slums that surround it. Here, on the road through La Verbena cemetery, hospital waste trucks rumble by; when they reach the end they tip their pile down into the valley.

I am early, so I walk slowly, kicking stones through the rows of niche tombs, stacked five high, artificial flowers drooping down. I pass some of the nicer mausoleums, and then I am among the graves in the scrub grass, markers tilted over or gone. Some are simple piles of dirt; others are human-sized hollows, where the bodies have been removed and dumped into the bone pits.





These dead were never
meant to speak again.
But they do.

A forensic anthropologist
examines a human skull ex-
humed from a mass grave in
Guatemala City. This one site
contained more than 10,000
unidentified bodies.

Jorge Lopez/Reuters



At left, workers examine remains in a "bone well," where more than 2,000 bodies were discovered. At right, the author descends into the well.

I stand outside a cement block wall, papered with the faces of the disappeared. A few young staff members arrive and wait as well, under pine trees that are blowing wildly now, this way and that. They eye me, but we say nothing.

The "disappeared" stare at me from the abyss of silence. Many are women, their hair and clothes out of style now. The men sport moustaches from the 1980s. I imagine each one grabbed by murderers, thrown into a van, driven somewhere dark, filthy, disgust-

brought and buried, many without being registered. Some, it seems, were dropped straight into the well. It doesn't take much imagination to see that La Verbena was a dumping ground for the murderers.

The FAFG, under its executive director Fredy Peccerelli, was created in the 1990s to investigate these crimes and uncover both bodies and hidden history. It is orchestrating these exhumations at La Verbena. This is one site out of hundreds they've investigated.

There's no building, just gray walls squar-

Whether or not they identify anyone, they are restoring dignity—life—to these bones, claiming them out of the dark earth of forgetfulness.

ing, sticky with blood, urine, and feces. The women are raped, the men too, and all of them mutilated, burned, or electrocuted, and finally killed. Some are then brought here and buried.

It's 9 o'clock. Someone with keys arrives, and we all file in. Jorge Mario Barrios shows me around. He's the forensic anthropologist for the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) in charge of the project. He's tall for a Guatemalan, nicely dressed in crisp black jeans, combat boots, and a button-bursting black shirt. He explains: Many people were dumped here at La Verbena cemetery as unknowns. They are supposed to be buried in the ground for seven years, and then gathered up and thrown into the ossuaries, the bone wells. But between the years 1978 and 1984—the peak years of the civil war in Guatemala—there was a massive upswing in the number of bodies being

ing in the huge work site, wooden pillars, and tin roofing, which sometimes keeps off the rain. The work tables are covered in thick black plastic; black sacks on the ground are for loose bones pulled out of the pit. Then there's the pit itself. Huge metal crossbeams, dangling with ropes and harnesses, stand over Well #3. The first well gave up 2,114 bodies. The second, massive well, 25 meters deep, held 12,168 bodies. Well #3 is a perfectly round sink hole, eight meters deep. Investigators expect to find about 20,000 bodies total in the three ossuaries. The U.N. commission that investigated the 36-year war and genocide in Guatemala estimates that 200,000 people lost their lives. FAFG figures come to 44,000 people detained and disappeared. Jorge Mario tells me that they hope to identify 100 remains from the pits as disappeared people—a slim percentage.

I have been walking with Guatemala for

28 years, since 1984, when these wells were in full operation, gaping open, swallowing the dead. I am a priest and a theologian, working on understanding theologically what the genocide means. Death. Crucifixion. Here we are, in Golgotha, the very place of the skulls. If we stay here long enough, and resist the too quick, cheap, or artificial resolution, we may see that the place of death is in fact the place of life. That God works in the universe by pulling life out of the grisly tomb. Those who work here, then, are God's hands of reconstruction.

Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. —Ezekiel 37:9

BUT BEFORE NEW life comes the way of the cross, the crucifixion.

Candi, an anthropology student and full-time FAFG employee, finds me a smock and takes me to her table. Slowly we untangle a pile of bones. They look like a mess to me, but Candi knows how to read them. These bones speak to her. She is unravelling the language of the dead and preparing to speak these things to the world of the living. No longer secret, no longer forgotten.

Slowly I begin to see. I'm back in high school biology. This is a radius. This is an ulna. This is a tibia. Piles of ribs, skull pieces, and the jaw. Teeth, some fallen out. The hip bone, which we'll use to determine the gender. The hard ridge above the eye socket—only men have that. We'll check the vertebrae, up and down, that can tell us the age. Here is the all-important femur. They take a DNA sample from each left femur they find, and try to match it to one of the 4,000 identified

family-types now waiting in the FAFG-created Victims and Families' National Gene Bank of Forced Disappearance. FAFG has created six categories of remains, from "A," evidence of death by firearm, to "F," a body partially putrefied, but not skeletonized, no sign of autopsy—someone thrown fresh into the pit.

I work all morning with Candi, cleaning bones with a little stick and brushes. She tells me about the dreams that followed her night after night when she first started working here. Her friends and family wonder why she is wasting her time and career—shouldn't we all just forget what happened and move on? Did it even really happen? We dust, pick, rub, clean, measure, and record. We saw off a piece of femur, put it in a paper bag, mark it, then go back to the black table, on to the next pile of bones. Five in a day, says Candi; that's good.

These people are engaged in an incredibly difficult job. They have bravura mixed with tenderness, an unspoken respect for the dead, and unbelievable courage. Foul language and jokes abound, but never about the bones, the bodies. No one I met talked much about faith, but each one seems to work from the ethical conviction that human life cannot be simply discarded, destroyed, or erased. They balance loving compassion for the human remains before them with a determination to keep working. They forge on through the bone piles, creating order and meaning out of nothingness and oblivion. Their actions—methodical, scientific, stubborn—threaten the house of terror that was built out of these bones. These dead were never meant to speak again. But they do.

My dreams this night are thick and worrisome. The interior landscape of my imagination is being reshaped; I embrace the crackling bones, and I love them in wordless, tearless grief.

The next day when I arrive my body is numb with fear. Today I go down into the pit. Raul, a forensic archeologist, has been on many exhumations. He is a bit older than the others, very matter-of-fact. He gives me a white protective suit, helmet, face mask, boots, gloves, harness, everything I need. God, mercifully, has given me a 72-hour cold for these days, and I can't smell a thing. I'm harnessed in, clipped to the rope. "Okay," says Raul, "Swing out over the pit." I dutifully swing out, and then slowly, as I saw the



With a poster of some of the 44,000 disappeared on the wall behind him, a Guatemalan anthropologist picks apart a bone pile.

Emilie Teresa Smith

others do, belay myself down, down, into Xibalba, the underworld, where the dead wait, restless.

It is damp, cold under the circling fans, eternally dark, yet brightly lit. Cockroaches scuttle every time something is lifted and moved. It is a space between worlds. I see only indecipherable rubble. But the archeologists know what they are looking for; they've done this thousands of times. We get to work. They brush all dirt, loose bones—anything that can't be linked to anything else—into a tub that is raised again and again. Then they find what counts as treasure—semi-intact remains. They mark them with yellow measuring sticks and a yellow number—we're up past 2,600 in Well #3. There's the flash of a photo. Then, gently, they gather the remains—bones, and clothes, sometimes a sheet or a blanket, all caked in dirt and human compost.

At last the call echoes down, "Coffee! Lunch!" We clip in, are hauled out, and I'm done for the day. I feel slightly sick, yet exhilarated. I feel close to those I have loved, but never known, those for whom I have been working all of my adult life. The eyes on the posters along the walls follow me.

O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you. —Ezekiel 37:4-5

IT WAS HOPED that the first well, which dates closest to the years of highest horror, would produce matches. Four thousand Guatemalan families have had their DNA recorded. So far, none of the bones tested have matched. I peer down into giant Well #2; I can't see the bottom, even with a flashlight. It's too deep.

According to U.S. historian Greg Grandin, "disappearing" political opponents was

refined in Guatemala in the late 1960s under the training and direction of the CIA. Later this technique was exported around the continent, and horror stories abound in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador. But Guatemala continues to hold the grisly record.

Each of the 44,000 Guatemalans who simply vanished during the war was a human being, with a family, dreams, and plans. Most are now just bones waiting to be found. Most never will be. But the work of Fredy, Jorge Mario, Raul, Candi, and the rest carries on anyway. Whether or not they identify anyone, they are restoring dignity—life—to these bones and to all the disappeared. They are claiming them out of the dark earth of forgetfulness, and—in the face of ongoing threats of violence and the national official insistence on oblivion—saying that these, our dead, all of them, have a place in Guatemala's story. What happened was the highest kind of crime, by a state apparatus committed at all costs to the preservation of the perverse power of a few violent and wealthy people. Many of the disappeared defended the outcast and the poor—and their deaths reflect the way of the Holy One of Peace, he who died on the hill at the place of the skull.

When my third and final day in the cemetery ends, I leave quickly and walk back up the dusty road. My friend Maco finds me, wistful, distracted, at the Pollo Campero on Roosevelt Boulevard and together we drive the three-hour road home to Quiché. My cemetery experience has unleashed *his* heart, and he cries, telling me about when his best friend was murdered by a military man. They were 15 years old, and David's head was blown near off, and then he was buried in Chinique. Most everyone from the region where I live has stories like this. My tears for the dead fall quietly in the dark. A full moon rises as we turn north, through the corn fields.

Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people ... I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.

—Ezekiel 37:12, 14

Emilie Teresa Smith is a Canadian Anglican priest and theologian living in Guatemala. She is co-president of the Oscar Romero International Network in Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America.

A 'BIZARRE AND PECULIAR' RULING

The Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case didn't actually make corporations into people, but it did undercut the role of actual, live human beings in elections.

IF THE FIRST decade of the 21st century began with the Supreme Court's Bush vs. Gore ruling that selected a U.S. president, it ended with another decision that was also conspicuous as a departure from long democratic precedent. And like Bush vs. Gore, it was a case of judicial activism tilting the electoral system toward conservative interests and outcomes.

The Court's 5 to 4 decision in *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* on Jan. 21, 2010, allowed the use of corporate and union money in unlimited sums to influence election campaigns. *Citizens United* was, all at once, a truly remarkable piece of judicial activism, a precedent-shattering evisceration of a century-long tradition of limiting corporate power in American politics, a break with the republican tradition's well-founded fear of political corruption, and a direct interference with the electoral rules in a way that favored those who had put the conservative justices in a position to make the ruling in the first place.

The case arose when *Citizens United*, a conservative group, brought suit arguing that it should be exempt from the restrictions of the 2002 McCain-Feingold campaign finance law for a movie it made that was sharply critical of Hillary Clinton, at the time a presidential candidate. The organization argued that, as a First Amendment matter, it should not be required by law to disclose who financed the film.

The conservative majority's determination to go far beyond the specifics of the case it was considering became clear in June 2009 when the Court, in a remarkable act of overreach, postponed a decision and called for new briefs and a highly unusual new hearing. It chose to consider an issue

only tangentially raised in the original case by calling into question a 1990 decision that upheld the long-standing ban on the use of corporate money in campaigns. As Justice John Paul Stevens noted later in his scalding dissent, "Essentially, five justices were unhappy with the limited nature of the case before us, so they changed the case to give themselves an opportunity to change the law."

The broad idea of keeping corporate money separate from politics went back to the 1907 Tillman Act, and all the precedents were on the side of insisting that corporations did not have the same rights as actual, live human beings, even if, as a legal fiction, corporations were often treated as "persons."

The entire episode came as something of a shock to those who had insisted that Chief Justice John Roberts was a relatively moderate conservative and that he would pay close attention to precedent. After all, Roberts had promised exactly this when he appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee at his confirmation hearings.

"I do think that it is a jolt to the legal system when you overrule a precedent," Roberts had said back in 2005. "Precedent plays an important role in promoting stability and evenhandedness. It is not enough—and the court has emphasized this on several occasions—it is not enough that you may think the prior decision was wrongly decided. That really doesn't answer the question. It just poses the question."

"And you do look at these other factors," Roberts went on, "like settled expectations, like the legitimacy of the Court, like whether

At right, the Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C., where the *Citizens United* decision reflected a twisted understanding of the power of corporate money in a democracy.





a particular precedent is workable or not, whether a precedent has been eroded by subsequent developments.” He paraphrased Alexander Hamilton as saying in *Federalist* #78, “To avoid an arbitrary discretion in the judges, they need to be bound down by rules and precedents.” This was, one might say, a thoughtful, conservative view.

BY ROBERTS’ OWN standards, *Citizens United* should have gone the other way. Tossing out an established system whose construction went back to 1907 was indeed

The Framers, Stevens argued, “took it as a given that corporations could be comprehensively regulated in the service of the public welfare.” The conservative majority “enlists the Framers in its defense without seriously grappling with their understandings of corporations or the free speech right, or with the republican principles that underlay those understandings ... To the contrary, this history helps illuminate just how extraordinarily dissonant the decision is.”

Citing the work of legal scholar Zephyr Teachout, Stevens noted that “it is fair to say”

The ban on corporate money in politics had been upheld over many years by justices of various philosophical leanings.

an act of “arbitrary discretion.” The ban on corporate money in politics had been upheld over many years by justices of various philosophical leanings. It was not the product of a single decision by a temporarily activist Court. And the precedents were clearly workable, since no one was asking the Court to change them, and parties and candidates had long lived by them. They had not been eroded. The corporate ban had been upheld in case after case, no matter where particular Court majorities stood on particular campaign finance provisions. The ban on corporate contributions was simply taken for granted. As the Court had stated just six years earlier, Congress’ power to prohibit direct corporate and union political spending “has been firmly embedded in our law.”

Rarely has a case so clearly pitted republican notions of self-government and the community’s right to keep the political system free of corruption against a radical kind of individualism conveying to corporations the same rights as those guaranteed citizens. The Founders played a key role in the dueling opinions of Justice Scalia, who supported the ruling, and Justice Stevens, who denounced the result as threatening “to undermine the integrity of elected institutions across the Nation.” The fact that each read the Founders differently pointed to the limits of a jurisprudence based on “original intention,” given the complexity of the Founders’ views and the habit of originalists to be absolutely confident in their ability to read the Founders’ minds.

that the Framers “were obsessed with corruption.” They understood this “to encompass the dependency of public officeholders on private interests ... They discussed corruption ‘more often in the Constitutional Convention than factions, violence, or instability.’ ... When they brought our constitutional order into being, the Framers had their minds trained on a threat to republican self-government that this Court has lost sight of.”

Scalia barely took Stevens’ argument seriously:

The Framers didn’t like corporations, the dissent concludes, and therefore it follows (as night the day) that corporations had no rights of free speech. Of course the Framers’ personal affection or disaffection for corporations is relevant only insofar as it can be thought to be reflected in the understood meaning of the text they enacted ... Even if we thought it proper to apply the dissent’s approach of excluding from First Amendment coverage what the Founders disliked, and even if we agreed that the Founders disliked founding-era corporations; modern corporations might not qualify for exclusion. Most of the Founders’ resentment towards corporations was directed at the state-granted monopoly privileges that individually chartered corporations enjoyed. Modern corporations do not have such privileges, and would probably have been favored by most of our enterprising Founders—excluding, perhaps, Thomas Jefferson and others favoring perpetuation of an agrarian society.

There is something breathtaking about defending a Court decision that overturned decades of precedent with the remarkably weak assertion that modern corporations “would probably have been favored by most of our enterprising Founders,” as if it were possible to know what the Founders would have made of Microsoft, Apple, General Motors, or ExxonMobil. All involved forms of economic organization unknown in 1787 and products that Hamilton, Madison, or Franklin could not have imagined. On the matter of fearing corruption, Stevens was surely closer to the Founders’ republican principles. And the very effort to convert a corporation into a person would have been as alien to the Founders as it was to Stevens. He wrote:

Although they make enormous contributions to our society, corporations are not actually members of it. They cannot vote or run for office. Because they may be managed and controlled by nonresidents, their interests may conflict in fundamental respects with the interests of eligible voters ... It might also be added that corporations have no consciences, no beliefs, no feelings, no thoughts, no desires. Corporations help structure and facilitate the activities of human beings, to be sure, and their “personhood” often serves as a useful legal fiction. But they are not themselves members of “We the People” by whom and for whom our Constitution was established.

The dissenting justice added a bit of common sense that seemed to escape the Court that day. “A democracy cannot function effectively,” he wrote, “when its constituent members believe laws are being bought and sold.”

Thus did conservative originalism help produce a decision about a set of institutions that the Founders would have found peculiar, involving an election campaign process totally unknown to them, on the basis of a theory that they would have considered bizarre. ■

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"Jumping Mullet" by Steve Shepard. Used by permission of the artist. All rights reserved.

The Sacred Fish

You can't desire to catch the sacred fish
as much as he desires to be caught
& yet
he darts through the dim depths
with tail swerve & swish
laughs with the joy of glistening fins
at huge holes in your net
through which he swims

To get the shining coin from his mouth
is worth selling all you have
To get *him* even better
Everything you know about him
wavers in uneven light

Just below the surface
so it's barely wet
you let down your net
as he dives to the bottom
You seek the depths
as he leaps through waves
You search the shallows
as he heads for open water
& your tattered nets come up empty

If you let him
he'll repair them himself
trim knotted clumps & untie tangles
Selecting the right fibers
he'll tear & twist
the sinews of your heart into fine mesh
stretch them as thin as a pin
as wide as your whole being
a needle-shimmer piercing your soul

Better is one day in his boats
than thousands elsewhere

D.S. Martin, a Canadian poet living in Ontario, is author of Poiema and So The Moon Would Not Be Swallowed.



By Julie Polter

THE VAGINA DIALOGUES

We've come a long way, baby. Or have we?

IT'S PROFOUNDLY DISHEARTENING to see people in political leadership and positions of cultural influence whose understanding of women's anatomy—and that it is possessed by human beings, not mythical prototype “whores,” “virgins,” or “martyr mothers”—hasn't progressed much past pre-adolescent hooting at drawings on the boys' room walls.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not actually looking for excuses to chat about vaginas or hormones with strangers or friends. I'm fairly comfortable with prudish reserve in daily life, especially when the alternative is coarse humor that's usually not very funny. Then again, if you watch TV sitcoms or contemporary comedy films, hearing the word “vagina” outside of a gynecologist's office isn't the surprise it once was. As Ann Hornaday noted in her March 13 essay in *The Washington Post*, the word



The new HBO series *Girls*, about a group of women in their early 20s, includes comedy writing with gynecological themes.

is now so prevalent, “it’s hard to believe that, just six years ago, *Grey’s Anatomy* producer Shonda Rhimes made ABC standards and practices executives so nervous about the word that she substituted the far more playful ‘va-jay-jay.’”

By contrast, when Eve Ensler’s “Vagina Monologues” debuted in 1996 it was controversial theater for a number of reasons, the most obvious being the first word in the title. The play was groundbreaking in its forthright exploration of women’s experiences—the brutal, the ecstatic, the ambivalent—in relation to women’s distinctive anatomy. It helped many women reclaim the language for their own bodies in the public sphere, rather than being limited to euphemisms and crudities deployed

Inside CultureWatch

40 A Musical Indictment

Danny Duncan Collum on Springsteen’s *Wrecking Ball*

43 Belief’s Strange Wonders

Brittany Shoot on *Sweet Heaven* *When I Die*

44 How to Proclaim Restoration

Andrew Wilkes reviews *Missional Preaching*

by others. The play opened up more space to talk about sexual abuse and violence against women, a step in weakening the shame that is part of any abuser’s arsenal.

Language is important for both literal health—knowledge of something is the first step toward caring for it—and the health of society. Our bodies are, as the psalmist writes, “fearfully and wonderfully made,” not inherently a source of shame.

EXAMPLES OF WHY it’s important to understand all this came thick and fast this winter—which was, to put it mildly, an *interesting* time to be listening to the news while

It was an interesting time to be listening to the news while in a female body.

in a female body. In February, the Virginia legislature began debating a bill that would require women to get an ultrasound before having an abortion. The bill mandated a written estimate of “gestational age” to be part of “informed consent.” To see the baby at these early stages of pregnancy requires an invasive transvaginal ultrasound, not the abdominal “jelly-on-the-belly” kind.

According to *Washington Post* reporters Anita Kumar and Laura Vozzella, writing in late February about Virginia’s debate, there were people on both sides of the issue, women and men, who initially had no sense of the invasiveness of the procedure required by the law they were debating (that is, exactly where that ultrasound probe would go). When the bill first came before the state Senate in January, two Democrats, one a doctor and the other with a background in health care, *did* bring some of this information to the Senate floor—“but delicately.” Said Sen. George L. Barker, “We tried to be a little sensitive with the language, particularly when you have the pages sitting behind you.” (Senate pages are often 13- and 14-year-olds.)

The senator’s discretion when it comes to the minors in the room is admirable on the one hand—but when legislation will directly affect bodies, it seems incumbent

Continued on Page 41

New & Noteworthy

STREET STORIES

UCLA professor Jorja Leap has immersed herself in the study of Los Angeles gangs since 2002. *Jumped In: What Gangs Taught Me about Violence, Drugs, Love, and Redemption* displays her deep passion and anthropological insight. Beacon Press



UP WITH (REAL) PEOPLE

Corporations Are Not People: Why They Have More Rights Than You Do and What You Can Do About It, by Jeffrey D. Clements, looks at the roots and consequences of the Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission case and presents a strategy to fight back. Berrett-Koehler

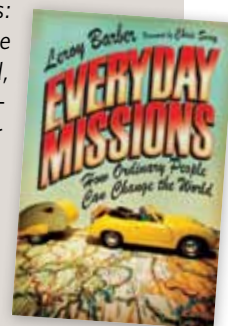


THE SONG REMAINS

For more than six decades, the Haitian band Septentrional has kept the music going despite dictatorships, natural disasters, and coup d’états. The documentary film *When the Drum Is Beating* interweaves the band’s story with that of Haiti, in all its despair, power, and perseverance. First Run Features

NOT PLAYING IT SAFE

In *Everyday Missions: How Ordinary People Can Change the World*, Mission Year president Leroy Barber encourages readers to take risks in the radical calls to justice and service that God might have in store. IVP Books



The Boss's Musical Indictment

IN THE GREAT gospel and blues tradition of affirming in the negative, Bruce Springsteen's new album, *Wrecking Ball*, is simultaneously a ferocious roar of righteous anger at what the captains of Wall Street did to America in 2008 and a riotous celebration of American roots. That could make it the perfect soundtrack for a spring and summer resurgence of the Occupy Wall Street campaign.

At this point a new album from Bruce Springsteen is no longer an earth-shaking event, even in the world of rock and roll. After all, the guy is 62. In the past few years, two core members of his band (organist Danny Federici and sax man Clarence Clemons) have died, not from rock-star excesses but from the old-guy ailments of skin cancer and stroke, respectively. And The Boss' last album of new material, the 2009 *Working on a Dream*, was definitely subpar.

But with *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen has, for the second time within



Reuters

Springsteen sings what politicians won't say: We were robbed, and the thieves have escaped justice.

a decade, stepped forward to assume the role of a Telecaster-toting poet laureate and produced a stirring work of popular art that speaks to the depths of the national condition. The first time was with *The Rising*, his 2002 meditation on mortality and loss in response to 9/11. The songs in this new collection plainly declare about our ongoing economic crisis what no mainstream national political leader has been willing to say: We were robbed, and the thieves have escaped justice.

Each of *Wrecking Ball*'s first five tracks explicitly calls out the titans of finance for crimes against

democracy and humanity. In "Jack of All Trades," the song's narrator even suggests that it might be a good idea to "hunt the bastards down and shoot 'em on sight." And the sixth track is called "This Depression" with a double meaning, both economic and emotional.

What Springsteen is doing here with his sound is at least as interesting as the message he brings.

Many of the tracks fuse the drum-loop experiments of *The Rising* with the great big, wide-open American roots sound he made with The Seeger Sessions Band. The result is a sonic Rainbow Coalition that ranges from an

Irish marching tune ("Death to My Hometown") to gospel and hip-hop ("Rocky Ground").

While "Jack of All Trades" toys with the notion of firearms as a tool for financial reform, "Death to My Hometown" puts forward a less dramatic but ultimately more practical suggestion: "get yourself a song to sing and sing it 'til you're done ... sing it hard and sing it well, and send the robber barons straight to hell."

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Springsteen seems to still believe, like Woody Guthrie, that songs

can inspire action—and maybe even that guitars can "kill" fascists.

In the spring and summer of 2012, the time will be right for marching in the streets and maybe dancing, too. *Wrecking Ball* hit the charts (pushing Adele out of the number one spot) just as stories began to appear about Occupy Wall Street's spring offensive to retake not just certain public spaces, but the American economy itself, including plans for a day of action on May 1 and moves to disrupt the Bank of America's May 9 shareholder meeting at corporate headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina.

And, in the most hopeful note I've seen in a long time, Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, recently told the Associated Press that his union will train at least 2,000 members to practice the nonviolent resistance techniques of Cesar Chavez and Mohandas Gandhi. That's the kind of wrecking ball that might make

Wall Street sit up and take notice. ■

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Continued from Page 39

upon legislators to engage in a clear debate, with technically accurate terms (as happened when the bill moved on to the Virginia House). Those young pages need only flip on the TV—network will do, no need for cable—to hear the word “vagina” employed in lame sitcom quips. Even if they were sheltered from popular culture, odds are some of those pages have surely been exposed in school hallways or playgrounds to at least a couple of anatomical epithets. Official medical terminology seems harmless compared to that.

FOR MYSELF, I was blind-sided by how the political really did feel personal. I happen to know from experience that a transvaginal ultrasound is physically uncomfortable,

Is it too much to ask legislators to speak cogently about women's health?

but not necessarily traumatic when recommended by a trusted physician in a situation where you know you have full agency to accept or reject her recommendation. My personal beliefs about abortion, among other reasons, make it unlikely that I'd find myself under the purview of a law mandating such an ultrasound. Still, I was agitated for days when I imagined undergoing the procedure under government order.

(Cartoonist Garry Trudeau went much, much further in his March 15 strip, equating such procedures, as mandated by a Texas law, with rape and dubbing the probe that is used a “shaming wand.” More than 60 newspapers refused to run some sections of the Trudeau series.)

Another troubling intersection of political debate with the female body this winter was the dispute over what kind of religious “conscience clause” will be included in the Affordable Care Act and how to handle paying for contraception. (That's when Rush Limbaugh took the low road by calling Georgetown University law student Sandra Fluke a “slut” and a “prostitute.”) The discussion kept circling back to insulting speculation



Lily Collins as Snow White in *Mirror, Mirror*.

ART WITH A BRUTAL HEART

DISNEY ANIMATION is often criticized for masking cynical corporate values—*Wall-E*'s profound challenge to over-consumption was accompanied by the selling of toys and games; the company claims to be pro-feminist but only tweaks the fairytale princess archetype with heroines who express their “strength” by showing that they can fight like a man.

Yet there's still some magic in the Disneyfication—*Fantasia*, *The Jungle Book*, and *The Lion King*, despite their political alarm bells (racism and homophobia are challenged and reinforced, the average of which can only compute to ambivalence), are examples of visual resplendence, a sense of humor, and an invitation to hope. The best parts of the Disney worldview look like the eschatological images in a Martin Luther King Jr. speech; the worst merely bolster a culture of privilege and exclusion.

The most Disney-like current film is ***Mirror, Mirror***, a retelling of the Snow White story, directed by the fantastic visual stylist Tarsem Singh. It features Julia Roberts in a wickedly entertaining turn as the queen, with a witty script, gorgeous set and costume design, and some bawdy fun. But the portrayal of Snow White as a “liberated” young woman whose liberation depends on her behaving like a Bruce Willis action character produces a paradox: Any of the images from this film could be exhibited in an art gallery—so elegantly composed and imaginative are they—but the ethical heart of the film isn't artful at all.

Mirror, Mirror's climax is disturbing: Snow White goads the evil queen into eating her own poisoned apple, shattering the mirror (in which—an interesting idea, this—the queen's wiser self resides), killing the queen, and making the world safe for a celebratory dance. In short, a family film about an innocent girl finding true love climaxes by turning the heroine into Kevin Spacey's character in *Seven*, a serial killer who murders people to teach them a lesson. When the queen prepares to take her own life at Snow White's behest, it's played for laughs and cheers, for applause, for closure. The audience is sent away with happy memories of gruesome pseudo-murder, wrapped so prettily in candy floss that we may not notice that the sugar-coated medicine we're drinking is actually killing us. When it comes to life, love, and death, there are better stories to be told.

On that note, two better stories worth recommending this month are the new special editions of ***A Night to Remember***, an emotionally revealing version of the Titanic tragedy, and ***The Last Temptation of Christ***—which presents a Jesus with something to say to the sacred-secular/human-divine paradox. And neither has any of the cynicism of *Mirror, Mirror*. Highly recommended. ■

Gareth Higgins is a Sojourners contributing editor and executive director of the Wild Goose Festival. Originally from Northern Ireland, he lives in Durham, North Carolina.

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CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

about the “morals” of women. As a celibate person who takes birth control pills to address a medical condition, I kept wondering when someone was going to speak cogently about women’s whole health. When would the conversation steer toward women’s health being a many-faceted thing—not actually limited to one’s nether regions or to having sex, and with whom, and under what legal circumstances? While my personal choices have been conservative, oddly—or not so oddly, if one has a passing knowledge of feminist cultural analysis—I felt just as demeaned as if they’d been otherwise.

AS A CHRISTIAN and a feminist, I believe all human beings are made of body and soul united, in the image of God. I believe Genesis 1:27 when it says “God created

started as a subversive expression of women’s empowerment, but the jokes are beginning to feel forced, lazy, and opportunistic.” Conversely, Hornaday notes, politicians and pundits and other political commentators, including Limbaugh and Trudeau, might be said to be taking women’s bodies very seriously. But culture warfare leaves something to be desired, she writes: “Forget ‘The Vagina Monologues’: Now the only show in town is the ‘Vagina Demagogues.’”

In the culture of the American church, we have a long way to go before we need a moratorium on speaking and writing forthrightly about our bodies. In a recent small blogland kerfuffle, evangelical writer Rachel Held Evans revealed she had to carefully parse with her publisher how she uses the word “vagina” in an upcoming book, lest it be rejected by

Most churches would cringe at the thought of holding sex ed classes.

humankind in God’s image ... male and female God created them.” I believe that you and me and Rush Limbaugh too are fearfully and wonderfully made, knitted together and intricately woven, with inward parts that bear the signature of God (Psalm 139: 13-15). These don’t have to be just lovely sentiments. They should have concrete, utterly unsentimental implications.

Because we know we are intricately made, I’d argue that Christians should reject public policy debates that don’t acknowledge the details of medical procedures, a working knowledge of human anatomy, and the specialized knowledge that health-care providers bring to the discussion.

Because we are knit together with nerves and sinew and blood and hormones, and made in the image of God, I’d argue that Christians should resist all efforts to reduce other human beings to pieces and parts—women are not “T and A” as the now-quaint sounding entertainment euphemism used to put it, nor are they just a uterus or vagina. Men, likewise, are more than six-pack abs or beer guts or penises.

In her essay, Hornaday argues for at least a partial moratorium on the use of the word “vagina” in TV and movies. She writes, “In entertainment, the use of the word may have

the major Christian bookstores that cater to her prime audience. In an effort to protect purity, religious folks often allow the dragons spawned by ignorance to roam freely. Most churches would cringe at the thought of holding sex ed classes, for example. But if properly done, what better place to learn about the care and functions and health of our whole selves, bodies and souls?

Any word can be used or abused, and even properly used terms can sometimes make us uncomfortable. But bold language about bodies, when rooted in respect and care and when used to honestly convey experiences that can’t be described otherwise—e.g. the power of sex, the trauma of obstetric fistula, the intricacies of medical treatments—is never profane. Abuse, commercial exploitation, trafficking, sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, humor that demeans and belittles—now *those* are obscene.

Whatever language we use, all of us can find ways to teach children, to teach one another, that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and that our bodies are not primarily problems to be regulated or solved, but reflections of the living God. ■

Julie Polter is an associate editor of Sojourners.

Reviewed by Brittany Shoot

CHRONICLING BELIEF'S STRANGE **WONDERS**

Sweet Heaven When I Die: Faith, Faithlessness, and the Country in Between,
by Jeff Sharlet. W.W. Norton.

WITHOUT SOME advance warning, you might not know that Jeff Sharlet is a man of God. That's not an insult or backward compliment so much as it is fact. Though perhaps best known for his acclaimed nonfiction expose *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*, Sharlet doesn't beat readers over the head with the proverbial Bible he carries in his knapsack. If you don't know what clues to look for—tales of Germans born again in Oklahoma, descriptions of hipster trucker caps emblazoned with flashy youth crusade logos—you might miss some of his most powerful nods to spiritual and religious influence in his travels. You might mistake the nondenominational journalist for just another fantastically gifted storyteller, a shrewd correspondent reporting back from remote spiritual enclaves, rather than a disciple of God seeking to understand those with whom he shares some belief.

Sweet Heaven When I Die begins by tracing Sharlet's youthful days visiting a girlfriend's Colorado ranch and his grandmother's Knoxville home. His keen sense of personal history first grounds his essays in what is clearly important in his own life: the closeness of loved ones, the nearness of God. But he quickly moves beyond situating himself in his writing and instead steps back to peer like a prophet into the lives of others—philosopher and educator Cornel West or Yiddish novelist Chava Rosenfarb.

Sharlet also nimbly passes through the outer realms of faith and lack thereof. In one of the book's most poignant vignettes, he retraces the short life of Brad Will, once called one of the country's "leading anarchists." (The oxymoronic label suitably amused Will.) Will's activism began in a same-sex marriage standoff with Promise

Keepers in Boulder, Colorado, and then carried him north to Quebec City and south to his 2006 death in Oaxaca de Juarez. Throughout his fiery life, he kept in close contact with his straight-laced Republican family; attending his mother's 60th birthday party celebration was a chief concern when he was detained for a week following the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle.

In Will, Sharlet finds just one more example of the richly complex lives of influential young people who are far more spiritual than they might appear. Will's radical, secular activism contrasts with the pious youth radicalizing that takes place at Teen Mania's Battle Cry rallies, Christian

youth conferences meant to further instill righteous indignation and fear into the hearts of young culture warriors. Sharlet finds Ron Luce's acerbic youth ministry—filling stadiums with frustrated teens, fascist imagery, and heavy metal anthems—in stark opposition with peaceful leftist political action. Without ever explicitly juxtaposing the incongruous examples of zeitgeist cultural events, the issues Sharlet leaves unexplored

or underexplained are often just as powerful as his direct correlations.

Sharlet is frequently likened to narrative nonfiction masters such as Joan Didion and Norman Mailer, and the comparison is apt. In the same way that Didion's writings about the Inland Empire make you want to relocate to Los Angeles, Sharlet's tales of Colorado Rocky Mountain outposts will make you consider packing up and heading out West. His descriptions of two-bit radio preachers who believe Russian UFOs are fulfilling biblical prophecy will make you start scouring secondhand shops for a functional shortwave radio.

Time and again, Sharlet's prose makes

some of the least compelling corners of the country seem like premier destinations. Most critical, as a faithful but objective observer, he doesn't pass judgment on the things he sees. His compassionate accounts from remote prisons and his evenhanded approach to describing animal rights activists and rural tweakers on homemade meth are far more powerful as a result. ■

Brittany Shoot, a Sojourners contributing writer, lives in San Francisco.

Reviewed by Beth Newberry

FROM THE HOLLERS TO CITY **STREETS**

Stream of Conscience, by 2/3 Goat.
twothirdsgoat.com.

THE VIDEO FOR the title track of 2/3 Goat's EP *Stream of Conscience* features members of the New York City-based band standing knee-deep in a stream in the mountains of Central Appalachia. Lead singer and mandolin player Annalyse McCoy belts: "Stream of conscience hear my cry / I don't want my hills to die." The video intermixes a fictional family's daily life in the coalfields with harrowing footage of mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining, which has destroyed more than 300 mountains in the region. In later scenes, the band walks down a country road with coal-dust covered miners, young people, and families in a rambling, spontaneous protest march. It truly is a visual evocation of Appalachia Rising—a tagline of the region's anti-MTR movement.

The other core members are guitarist, song writer, and vocalist Ryan Dunn and fiddler Ryan Guerra. 2/3 Goat is a self-proclaimed metro-billy band, a portmanteau referring to the music's urban audience and its roots in country and mountain music. Its acoustic-driven, bluegrass- and old-time-music-inspired sound has engaging harmonies and a sweetness and honesty to it. The other tracks on this five-song release are strong, both in musical composition and storytelling. "Lay It on the Line" is a playful duet between McCoy and Dunn with upbeat fiddle, guitar, and mandolin accompaniment that will make you want to flat foot



(if you have enough mountain swagger to pull it off) to this almost-love song. “Band of Gold” highlights McCoy’s textured alto voice and ability to wail when the lyrics call for it. The tone is emotionally heavy, but the fiddle accompaniment and the shift in tempo at the end of the song save it from needing a side of whiskey to wash it down.

While referencing traditional mountain and bluegrass music, 2/3 Goat’s sound fits in nicely with contemporary folk and indie-inspired rock such as the Yep Roc label’s Cheyenne Marie Mize, Stockholm-export First Aid Kit, and English chanteuse Laura Marling. Dunn’s singing style evokes Dan Tyminski of Union Station fame. 2/3 Goat’s music carries on the tradition of Hazel Dickens and Jean Ritchie, two Appalachian singer-songwriters who lived in cities outside of the region for most of their careers. McCoy’s cadence is reminiscent of Dickens, whose social justice anthems and ballads narrated the late 20th century labor movement, while “Stream of Conscience” feels akin to Ritchie’s song “Black Waters,” a traditional music breakthrough in 1977 that was a statement piece about strip mining methods of that era.

One of the band’s key messages is that MTR affects all Americans, not just Central

2/3 Goat wants to get you on your feet dancing all the way to the picket line.

Appalachians, as the coal is used to produce energy for those of us outside the region. McCoy is a member of the creative and social action collective New York Loves Mountains, comprised of expatriate Appalachians who promote and spread the message that MTR hurts all of us from the hollers to the boroughs. So 2/3 Goat is a mission-minded folk rock group that wants to get you out of your seat and on your feet dancing ... all the way to the front of the stage, or to the picket line, or to your legislator’s office, or the coal company’s front door. ■

Beth Newberry, a former Sojourners intern, is co-publisher of *The Hillville* (thehillville.com), a website that explores the urban-Appalachian connection.



File graphic

Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

HOW TO PROCLAIM RESTORATION

Missional Preaching: Engage, Embrace, Transform, by Al Tizon. Judson Press.

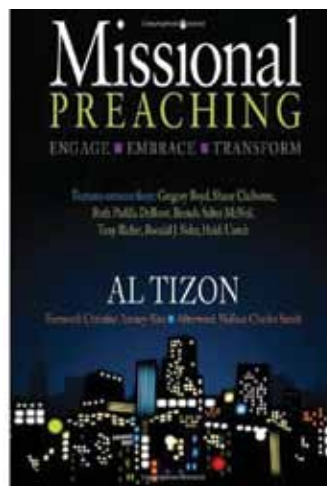
AL TIZON'S *Missional Preaching*, as one might expect, is designed for those who proclaim the gospel. The text, moreover, should prove useful to homiletics professors, local ministerial groups, and church bodies seeking to encourage more reflective approaches to the craft of sermon-making. Tizon, an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church and professor of evangelism and holistic ministry at Palmer Theological Seminary, writes with lively prose, frequently deploying humor and hyperbole to complement biblical exposition and theological reflection.

For Tizon, missional conviction is about joining “God’s mission to transform the world, as the church strives in the Spirit to be authentically relational, intellectually and theologically grounded, culturally and socio-economically diverse, and radically committed to both God and neighbor, especially the poor.” Tizon’s commitment to mission is both theological

and autobiographical: The author spent nine years doing community development in the Philippines and currently serves as the director of the Word and Deed network of Evangelicals for Social Action.

Structurally, Tizon begins with three chapters on missional theology, covering liturgy, biblical perspectives on mission, and the *missio Dei* (the mission of God). For Tizon, *missio Dei* signifies God’s restorative purposes for the world, beginning with Israel and consummating in Christ. To complement the opening essays, each subsequent chapter pairs Tizon’s reflection on a missional topic with a sermon on the same subject matter. In a particularly compelling chapter, the author’s insights on whole-life stewardship are concluded by a riveting homily from Shane Claiborne.

Tizon’s work occupies a distinctive space within the subgenre of thematic books on preaching. Most texts within the genre focus on the form



or theology of preaching. Rarely does one find a volume that combines a theological treatment of preaching and well-executed sermons, intimating possible ways of—and compelling reasons for—constructing a missional sermon.

Tizon contends that sermons are “an exposition of a biblical passage, story, and/or principle for the edification of the church, the transformation of the world, and the glory of God.” This threefold motif—edify the church, transform the world, and glorify God—offers an important rationale for the preaching act itself. The shape and exact content may differ across denomination, region, and so on, but surely the highest and best aims of proclamation include strengthening the faithful, honoring God, and incorporating what homiletics professor Henry Mitchell calls a “behavioral imperative” to make a positive difference within our respective spheres of influence.

Nevertheless, *Missional Preaching* could be strengthened by incorporating a broader range of Christian grammar. His construal of mission often foregrounds an action-oriented view of the church, one that perceives a strong correspondence between our world-changing efforts and a world that is altered because of those efforts. This viewpoint, while true in many instances, does not sufficiently create theological space for lament, loss, and loneliness. To paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., our participation in God’s mission of restoring the world is punctuated by at least as many Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays as Resurrection Sundays. This critique does not suggest a deficiency with Tizon’s theology (I imagine that he would agree) as much as it highlights the difficulty of painting nuanced images of preaching in a book of 165 pages.

The core argument of *Missional Preaching* is this: Christians are sought after by God’s missional love and sent out within the power of the Spirit to participate in God’s shalom project of restoring the world. This argument, despite its omissions, is a solid one and worthy of careful consideration. ■

Andrew Wilkes (@andrewjwilkes) is the faith and community relations associate for Habitat for Humanity-New York City and an affiliate minister at the Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York.

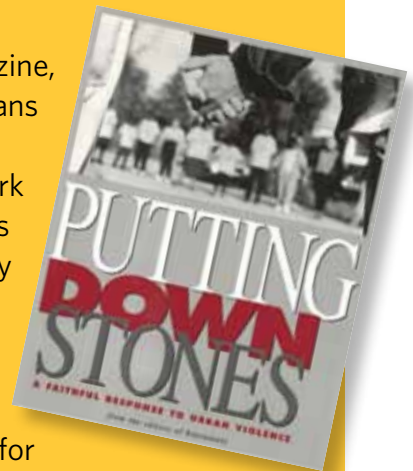
Turn the other cheek? ME?!

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Retired Aerospace Engineer joins the “Nature of God” debate.

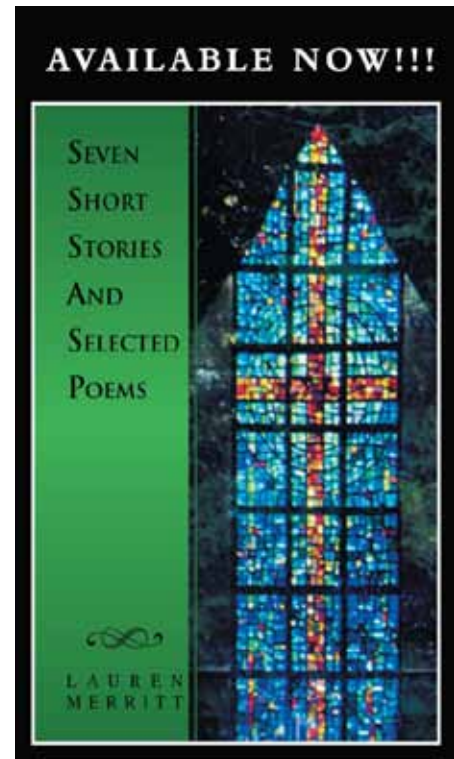
In author Lauren Merritt’s new and opulent offering, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems*, he leaves behind the world of aerospace engineering and veers into the ancient debate of the nature of God. This collection of short stories and related poetry comes out in favor of “I am is God” which appeals to people who have had enough of the trappings of our present day religious organizations. He does this through relentless examination of his own spiritual journey towards self-awareness unleashing merciless insight, fiery wit, and fierce compassion through illuminating narratives and verses.

Born out of the author’s creative mind, *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* features stories of heroes and heroines, love, lust and loss, reason and insanity, innocence and impurity. No matter the situation in which his protagonists find themselves – Adam’s endless search for Eve, one listless child’s longing for a complete family, a PTSD patient’s effort to overcome his trauma, one man’s participation in a ceremonial dance, a father’s lifetime of memories unearthed, a couple’s unfinished love affair – Merritt conveys their experience with endless wit and flowing prose that reminds readers, page by page, of the beauty of the written word.

These *Seven Short Stories And Selected Poems* can be read as a literary journal of a great writer’s career, beginning with a stance that is cold, bitter and intellectual to one that is warm, inviting, and comforting. From the spiritual journey perspective, Merritt’s engineering knowledge of intellectual constructs allows him to steer away from rocky shores and sandy shoals to provide a clean, fresh, perspective to a rather ancient concept of God.

Lauren Merritt started his career earning a BSEE and MSE from the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, Calif. His designs are now circling the earth, rusting away on the moon, and drifting away far beyond the orbit of Pluto. His career was cut short, having accumulated 12 patents and written 13 trade journal articles, in 2004 due to the onset of Parkinson’s disease. He has published a book of his poetry and continues to write poems and a weekly newsletter for Valley Presbyterian Church of Portola Valley, Calif. where he serves as Poet Laureate.

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Rev. Gerald L. Durley

Bio: Pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.

Website: providenceatlanta.org

1 How did you get involved in environmental justice? About six years ago, Laura Seydel, Ted Turner's daughter, invited me to see a movie, *The Great Warming*. At the time, the environment was the last thing on my mind. I was more concerned about HIV, cholesterol, diabetes, unfair jail sentences, disparity in drug sentencing—these kinds of things. But I went to see the film.

The next thing I knew I was talking to African-American pastors about something that was not on our screen: Earth Day. If we understand that God created a perfect earth and that we're destroying it, then we have an obligation to enlighten our people about this and find out what we can do. And I had to tell the people in the old environmental community that this is not a campaign—it has to be a *movement*, similar to the civil rights movement. People must be involved, knowledgeable, aware.

2 Why have you used the word "conversion" to talk about your awakening to environmental needs?

I could not make the connections initially between my community and polar bears, so I began to read about it. Once I began to understand, I took it from 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people will humble themselves and seek my face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and heal their land." I saw the land as bigger than just the ground; I saw the land as being all of us, as one. If God can create a climate where ani-



emissions, health issues around asthma, and all of that. But when the economic downturn hit, people naturally began to think about employment, health insurance—"bread and butter" issues. When you talk about, let's say, a nuclear plant that won't be built for 10 years, that's on the back burner. What we're doing is showing that there is no disconnect between the two.

4 What gives you strength in your ministry? God is the God of all people. God is the kind of God that would not put us someplace without a way for us to survive. And that's where faith comes in—the same way that we fought for the right to vote in '64 and '65, now we've

"The same way we fought for the right to vote, we've got to stand up for clean air and water."

mals and plants and human beings work together, we have a responsibility to try to maintain that balance. That's when the "conversion" really hit me.

3 Was environmental justice work picking up steam in the African-American community? It was picking up quite a bit of steam—many of us began to talk in terms of light bulbs, carbon

got to stand up for clean energy, clean air, and clean water, as a right for people. If it means marching, if it means petitioning, if it means raising funds, if it means preaching, then we've got to use those avenues. We serve a sovereign God that will always be there for the uplifting that we're called to do: the uplifting of God's people here on earth.

—Interview by Anne Marie Roderick

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God's Passionate Vulnerability

ONE OF THE DRAWBACKS intrinsic to liturgical worship is the length of time it takes to adopt expressions that are newly current and potent into the approved forms. Certain forms of language become deeply important to a generation—key words and symbols that are pregnant with meaning, yet haven't been incorporated officially into our forms of worship. So we often feel a certain dissonance in church as the language of worship seems impoverished by the absence of expressions we value so highly in our own exploration into God today. I long for prayers that express, directly and passionately, that God suffers. I look forward to praising God's vulnerability. I am impatient for the recasting of prayer to praise the Creator in terms that unequivocally embrace the evolutionary perspective. In the meantime, preaching is the key field for using this fresh language with passion, in an exciting conversation with ancient expressions and classic symbols that can never become out of date, as long as we use our imaginations to keep on releasing their latent powers.

The scriptures in this season provide rich opportunities for exploring great images of God's transforming power in vulnerability. Has anyone coined the word "paradoxology" yet to express the essence of transformative Christian worship? Only paradoxical language can point with any degree of success to the mystery of God and the revelatory revolution that springs into life out of the action of Jesus, the passion of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus.



Martin Smith is an Episcopal priest serving at St. Columba's Church in Washington, D.C.

[JUNE 3]

Leadership Reborn

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?—a burning question that this Sunday's scriptures will address if we place ourselves under their authority. The electrifying passage about the vision of Isaiah tells us about the radical honesty that springs from seeking the face of God. We dare not congratulate ourselves on our prophetic commitment; the truth is that we belong to a people of unclean lips. We must not pretend that we can protect our own consciousness from being contaminated by the habitual lying with which our national political discourse is riddled. "I am a man of unclean lips!" (Isaiah 6:5). God's response is to cauterize the prophet's lips so he won't pander to mass thinking.

To be a prophet is to take on the divine viewpoint, however sharply it makes us differ from the views of the smart pundits or the trends revealed in the polls. The verses that follow today's passage are biting ironic. God sends us to bear witness to the truth even though its strangeness seems guaranteed to provoke incomprehension and rejection.

Nicodemus is described as leader and teacher, and he brings to Jesus one of the most searching questions that any leader can face: Is real change possible? Nicodemus has the honesty to pose the question in terms of his own doubtful capacity for radical change in response to the drastic newness that Jesus seems bent on unleashing. "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4). Realistic resignation, rather than cynicism, seems to lie behind this poignant question. Even the best leaders can come to terms with the status quo and limit themselves to playing the cards that the system has dealt them, just trying to keep as much integrity as they can. Jesus' response is to insist on the possibility of radical new beginnings. Born again in the community of the baptized, we can become agents of limitless possibilities, animated by the spontaneity and inventiveness of the Spirit who won't be pinned down by precedents or confined within the bounds of human forecasting.

[JUNE 10]

God's New Family

1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15; Psalm 130;
2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1; Mark 3:20-35

IT'S SAD THAT Jesus' words in Mark about unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit have tormented the tender consciences of individuals. Listen carefully to the passage and we will realize that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is essentially a collective phenomenon: "For *they* had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (3:30). It is the scribes, acting in professional concert, who denounce Jesus as a blasphemer evidently in league with Satan. And it is the extended family of Jesus who is worried that he deserves his growing reputation as a hot head dabbling in dangerous occult practices, and come to reel him back into normality and the security of the family business.

Jesus actually is dangerous because he authoritatively invites his hearers to break the spell of conservative mass consciousness, so resistant to change, and to extricate themselves from the confinement of family rules and rigid tradition. But this breaking free doesn't isolate us as individualistic rebels. There is a new kind of community in the making, a new family, open to all, collaborating with God in bringing health, freedom, and hope: the family of Jesus. Jesus' words "Here are my mother and my brothers!" (3:34) are the real assertion of his "family values." Their meaning is quite different than the one intended by those who bandy these words about as a reactionary slogan.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul's words "our outer nature is wasting away while our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (4:16) follow his reminder about the stresses of constantly being attacked. Relentless opposition takes its toll, but it doesn't tempt him to tone down the paradoxical message of the cross and resurrection in order to make his life more secure. Paul feels his own vulnerability as an inevitable participation in and expression of that message. The power of the resurrection is at work in the very places where we meet risk and suffering and incite resistance.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at www.sojournal.net/ptw.

[JUNE 17]

Time-Bomb Parables

1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15;
2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

"HE DID NOT speak to them, except in parables" (Mark 4:34). Jesus' use of parables is consistent with his subversive strategy, planting riddles in the mind of his hearers that can suddenly get them to see the action of God in radically different ways. Parables are miniature time bombs, and when they have gone off in the heart we can't see things in the same way ever again. We can't "unknow" what the parable has opened up.

The parable of the seed growing secretly and the parable of the mustard seed don't appear at first to be particularly radical, but for those who are ready for a change of heart they point to the divine energies hidden in small beginnings: in the efforts of obscure people; in the potential of those who have been made to feel powerless; in the exponential potency of networks formed among those who don't appear to count; in the divine grace that burgeons even where human resources seem scant. Dangerous and wonderful ideas.

The story of how Samuel was guided to turn away all the older sons of Jesse and anoint David, the youngest, as Saul's successor shows that this paradoxical thread runs through the scriptures. David's absence from the gathering with Samuel wasn't even thought to matter. But God chooses the one who was automatically assumed to be out of the running.

The passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is one of the most passionate expressions of the power of Christ to totally change our way of understanding both the human vocation and the power of God. "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (5:17). The Christian message is not a mere added ingredient to the body of conventional human wisdom. It initiates us into an entirely different way of experiencing the world. Looking back, we see that conventional human attitudes to power and authority, and typical ideas about divinity, amount to false consciousness, the alienated mind "according to the flesh."

[JUNE 24]

Grace and Power

1 Samuel 17:57 - 18:5, 10-16; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

WHEN WE LISTEN to Mark's account of Jesus stilling the storm, it would be good to remind ourselves that the gospels were written not for private study but dramatic recitation in a gathering. At the time they were written, few could read, and all depended on the skill of the literate brother or sister who could bring the stories to life. We can tell from this story that the effect was awe-inspiring. "And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this that even the wind and sea obey him?'" (4:41). It is on this note of awe that Mark's gospel reaches its climax, with the women rushing from the empty tomb in terror and amazement, so stunned that they spoke to no one as they dashed back to break the news. The listeners are left holding their breath in awe as once again the great question resonates in the silence: "Who then is this?" We are not told; we must answer the question for ourselves as we open ourselves to the secret presence of the Lord in our midst. Only those who risk personal connection with him here and now, in silent wonder, can answer from first-hand experience.

The poignancy of the story lies in Jesus' own vulnerability, asleep in exhaustion in the boat while the storm whips up. This paradoxical theme of grace and power springing up in the place of weakness runs through our other readings. Jonathan expresses the vulnerability of deep love in stripping himself of his armor and weapons and giving them to David (1 Samuel 18:4). David is exposed to the jealousy of Saul, who tries to kill him. And Paul expresses the paradox of grace in vulnerability with unforgettable lyrical power, almost singing the vocation of an apostle: "As imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:8-10). ■

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New, Improved Terrorists!

EVERYONE CAN USE a fresh start from time to time. When Enco and Esso oil companies combined in 1973, they came up with the name Exxon—a word that at the time had no meaning or connotation—and then moved forward as a completely new company. Now, of course, we know that Exxon means “Lucifer’s Henchperson of the Coming Darkness.” So when Exxon and Mobil combined in 1999 to

delicious cookies they sold door to door. (Thin Mints were my favorite.)

Shortly before his death, bin Laden had drafted a letter to associates asserting that al Qaeda should get a new name and, since ExxonMobil was already taken, he came up with a few possibilities, such as the following, translated into English (you’re welcome):

Smite Club. Similar to *Fight Club*, the movie about young men with a penchant for violence, it has a nice Old Testament feel. Plus, with “smite” you lose the “al,” which is the next-door neighbor whose lawn mower you need to return, as soon as you come up with a believable story for why it only has one wheel. “Club” works because al Qaeda is already kind of a club, although the moms usually don’t bring out Thin Mints when it meets in the tree house.

Death by Pillows. This name has it all. It starts out strong with the traditional high five of extremists, balanced quickly by something soft and invitational. It combines the threat of a violent end with the comfort of a good night’s sleep, presumably free of assassination attempts. It’s yin and yang, sour and sweet, and shows the powerful determination of the all-new al Qaeda: You mess with us, and you’ll be spitting out goose down for a long time.

Angry Puppies. This one has that all-important appeal to the younger set. Having lost almost a generation of fighters to the cause, al

Ken Davis
 Qaeda needs to recruit fresh blood, and what better way than with the promise of something cute and cuddly. Note: Depending on cultural differences of the target audience, “puppies” can be replaced with the word “ponies” or “Big Bird.”

Datsun. This might be a stretch, but hear me out. In the 1970s, you could buy a new Datsun 510 for \$2,000, a price that reflected its inexpensive materials, its simplicity of design, and the affordability of replacing it when a fender bender caused it to crumple like the tin box it was. Cheap and lethal: the perfect slogan for the new al Qaeda.

Unfortunately, Nissan Motors just announced it was reprising the name, so that won’t work. Does “Angry Pinto” do anything for you?

Planned Parenthood. Al Qaeda leaders don’t know what it is about these two words that arouses such blood-curdling hatred and fear among Americans, but at least half the infidels on Capitol Hill can’t stand them, so that’s a good thing, right? If you can’t destroy the Great Satan, might as well make him get all red in the face.

OR THEY COULD just go with a tried-and-true name, one that personifies al Qaeda’s commitment to world enslavement and domination: Exxon.

I think it’s available. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Even al Qaeda can use re-branding.

become the most powerful oil company in the world (Saudi Arabia is a small subsidiary), they wanted to distance themselves from the high negatives of the old name. So they came up with ExxonMobil, leading a confused public to ask, “Gee, I wonder what they sell?”

The point is, sometimes institutions need a makeover, and who better to turn over a new leaf than al Qaeda, an organization that, for at least the last decade, has suffered some really bad press.

As documents from his not-so-secret compound have revealed, al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was concerned about the deteriorating reputation of his organization. The brand had become a problem. Too many mistakes in targeting and execution had tarnished all the positives of the proud al Qaeda name, which used to be synonymous with acts of mercy, community building, and the

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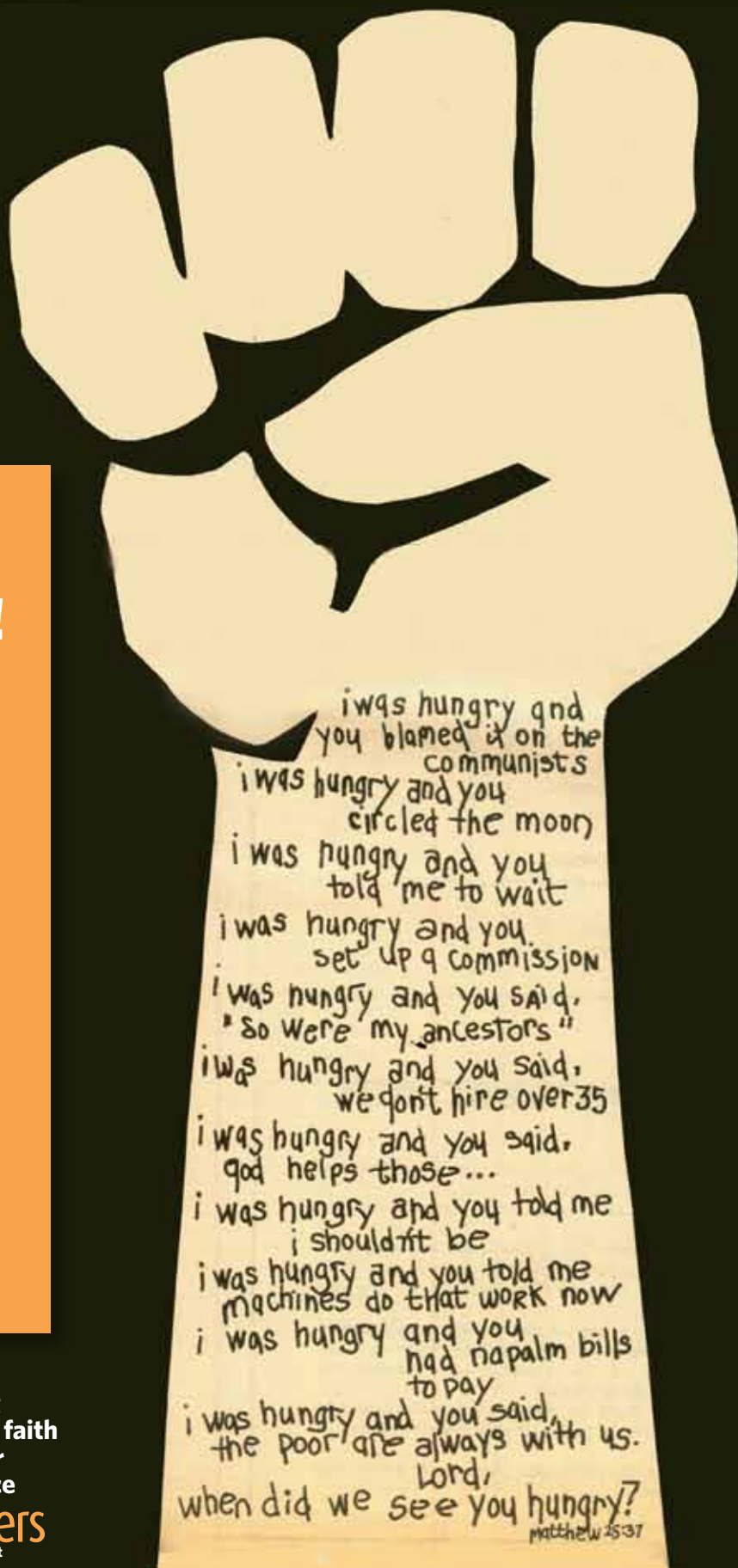
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